

THE

**YELLOW
CRYSTAL**

ANTHONY WYNNE

THE YELLOW CRYSTAL

Doctor Hailey Detective Novels,
by Anthony Wynne

THE ROOM WITH THE IRON SHUTTERS
THE FOURTH FINGER
THE DAGGER
THE RED SCAR
THE HORSEMAN OF DEATH
SINNERS GO SECRETLY
THE MYSTERY OF THE ASHES
THE DOUBLE THIRTEEN
THE SIGN OF EVIL

The Yellow Crystal

Anthony Wynne



1930

Philadelphia & London

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

Copyright, 1930, by
J. B. Lippincott Company
Printed in the U. S. A.

To
Buzzer

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. "An Eerie Presentiment"	11
II. Professor Carpenter	17
III. The Facts of the Case	23
IV. Lady Oldmay	30
V. The Brass Rowlock	37
VI. Dyke Duxford	43
VII. Ned Oldmay	55
VIII. "Not Guilty"	62
IX. Professor Carpenter Explains	74
X. The Man in the Boat	83
XI. Currents	88
XII. A Hysterical Girl	94
XIII. When the Wind's in the East	102
XIV. A Closed Room	106
XV. Father and Son	116
XVI. Circumstantial Evidence	121
XVII. Diamond Cut Diamond	126
XVIII. A Packet of Jewels	134
XIX. The Perfect Butler	142
XX. A Confession	151
XXI. Father and Daughter	160
XXII. A Lonely Man	166
XXIII. Mother and Son	174
XXIV. Footsteps	180
XXV. The Yellow Crystal	194
XXVI. Nagge Protests	201
XXVII. The Riddle of the Sands	211
XXVIII. A Matter of Minutes	219
XXIX. The Doctrine of Reaction	229

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXX. The Crystal Again	247
XXXI. The Coal Glove	254
XXXII. The End of the Road	259
XXXIII. A Damp Bathing Suit	269
XXXIV. The Muzzle of the Gun	276
XXXV. The Head of the Horseman	280
XXXVI. The Assassin	284
XXXVII. The Lure of Death	294
XXXVIII. A Resolute Course	299

THE YELLOW CRYSTAL

CHAPTER I

"AN EERIE PRESENTIMENT"

COLONEL WICKHAM, chief of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, took a letter from his pocket-book and handed it to Dr. Eustace Hailey.

"Read it," he exclaimed in the tones of a man whose nerves are on edge.

Dr. Hailey was seated at his desk. He raised his eyeglass, a plain monocle, without rim, and set it in his eye. He gazed for a few moments at the envelope, which was addressed in a heavy sprawling hand: "To Colonel Wickham, Scotland Yard, London," and marked "Personal and Private." The post-mark indicated that the letter had been posted the day before at Pykewood R.S.O. A slight frown gathered on his brow.

"Sir John Oldmay?"

"Yes."

The doctor withdrew the letter, using a deliberation in the process which visibly exasperated his companion. He spread out the single sheet, with its heavy crest and florid superscription, and read:

MY DEAR DICK,

I am writing to you because I feel that I am going to die. I noticed this morning that I could smell the roses in my garden from my bedroom window. I found myself, too, listening to the lapping of the waves on the shingle, though neither Gertrude nor anybody else could hear

them. My bathe caused me a severe shivering fit when I came out of the water. Towards evening the feeling of approaching death grew acute.

I find it difficult to describe this feeling in other terms than those I have used about my sense of smell and my sense of hearing. I fancy that, at the back of all our minds, there's a presentiment of death. My present feeling seems to be a great exaggeration of that—just as my power to smell the roses and hear the waves is an exaggeration of ordinary senses.

You may say I am ill. I don't think so. But for family disturbances, I have no cares, bodily or mental. That is why I am writing to you. *The death that seems to threaten me is not a death by illness but a death by violence. . . .*

As I write this I start up. I go to the door of the room (my study) and find myself actually locking the door. What do I fear? I don't know. Is there anybody who might wish to murder me? I can't think of a soul. . . . You know how the seagulls croak and "laugh" here sometimes at night. They are busy just now—a most horrible sound!

I'm going to post this letter immediately so that, whatever happens, you will be seized of my condition. If nothing happens I shall perhaps regret that I wrote it. But we have so often talked about premonitions that, now that the opportunity has come to put speculation to the test, I think it ought to be taken. Even so, I suppose that if what I fear—I *do* fear it, please note—befalls me, it will be said that all is explicable in terms of coincidence.

I had an idea of writing to Eustace Hailey, but feel too tired now. If you see him by all means show him this letter.

Yours,

JOHN

Dr. Hailey allowed his eyeglass to drop. He looked up into Wickham's disciplined face.

"Many years ago," he said, "I made the observation that increased sensual acuity often pre-

cedes a rise of temperature. I recall a hospital patient who used to say that he could smell the scented soap on the doctor's table in the ward when he was about to suffer a relapse of malarial fever."

"It's a queer letter, eh?"

"Very queer. Very unlike John Oldmay."

Wickham stared into vacancy in a way which suggested that his mind was being dug for buried treasure.

"I'm not so sure." He hesitated but decided apparently to refrain from disclosing such treasure as may have been unearthed. "It's obvious to me anyhow that John wrote this letter sincerely," he said. "Is that your reading?"

"Yes."

"I suppose if one made up one's mind to kill, the victim might get an inkling of what was coming?"

"Possibly."

"I mean, by mental telepathy. Don't you believe in mental telepathy?"

"It is difficult, sometimes, not to believe in it."

"That means you don't believe in it."

Wickham laughed as he spoke, but his laughter was empty of mirth, an exclamation mark. He seemed bored with the subject he was talking about or, at any rate, anxious to dispose of it quickly. He had a reputation for disposing quickly of difficulties which vexed other people. Dr. Hailey found it hard to resist the suggestion that, by

not giving a positive assurance, he was obtruding.

"I'm prepared to explain my ideas," he remarked with a touch of malice.

"No. It's enough for me that the case isn't proved. That's what your hesitation amounts to. I must take it or leave it at that." Wickham strode about the room, a custom of his when anybody offered to explain anything. "Would fever cause forebodings of death?" he asked sharply.

"It might."

There was a moment of silence. The detective approached the doctor, staring at him.

"What do you think about it?"

"I confess I feel a little uneasy."

"Nothing more than that?"

Wickham's voice fell.

"Perhaps a little more. I suppose that I have the human instinct to believe in eerie presentiments, though I have done my best to keep it under control."

Wickham sat down and leaned back, suddenly, in his chair. His body seemed to relax, as if a moment of tension had passed, but the doctor observed that he grasped the arms of the chair so firmly as to blanch his knuckles. His face, which always conveyed an impression of length, seemed longer than usual.

"John and I were schoolfellows," he stated, "and very close friends. Queerly enough it was he, not I, who was interested in detective work in those days. He used to devour Sherlock Holmes

and never wearied of expounding the merits of deductive reasoning. Everything, in his opinion, could be explained in terms of material fact—from the mud on a bootlace to a ghost in a country churchyard. I can still hear him dismissing the whole realm of the supernatural as ‘candlepower.’ He held that electric light had laid all the ghosts in England. ‘It shows ’em up, Dick. You can’t have ghosts without candles.’ I don’t think that, till he sat down to write this letter his opinions had changed much. Less than a month ago, when we dined together at his cousin’s, Professor Carpenter’s, he told me he had just been reading a book on Medicine and Magic and went on to expound the doctrines of Freud on the only true explanation of ‘so-called spiritual experiences.’ Carpenter’s a philosopher of the school of Hegel and was duly infuriated.”

Wickham raised himself in his chair; his voice, which had held a conversational tone, grew loud.

“John Oldmay,” he said, “was murdered this morning.”

CHAPTER II

PROFESSOR CARPENTER

WICKHAM remained silent for some minutes and Dr. Hailey did not break the silence. The tension in the room found its first relief when a heavy vehicle went lumbering down Harley Street, shaking the fabric of the house.

"The Northumbrian County Police called me up this evening," the detective said at last. "It appears that John Oldmay left Pykewood Hill as usual this morning for his bathe. You know that he always had a swim before breakfast. He was in his bathing costume; the house is close to the shore. When he didn't return, Lady Oldmay and his son went to look for him. They saw his foot-marks on the sand, going down into the water, and his dressing-gown and towel were lying on the beach, but he had disappeared. The alarm was then given and a search party, which included the village constable, put off in a boat. They found the body, floating just under the surface of the water, near the shore. The top of the head had been battered in."

Wickham rose and strode to the fireplace. He stood, gazing in front of him.

"The medical evidence is to the effect that he wasn't drowned. He was killed. It's practically certain that the murderer used a boat, because

there were no footprints on the sand other than John's."

"The tide?"

"Was rising."

"So that that particular piece of sand had been uncovered for several hours?"

Wickham nodded.

"I'm going up to Northumberland myself," he declared. "I feel I owe it to John's memory." He paused. "Can you accompany me?"

"When?"

"To-night. As a matter of fact I've anticipated. A couple of sleepers have been booked on the night Scotsman. I thought, when you had read John's letter, you'd be interested. John's anticipation of his death may or may not be a valuable clue; you are the one man in England most capable, if I may say so, of giving that fact its due weight."

Dr. Hailey's brow contracted. The praise was generous and pleased him. If Wickham jibbed at explanations, he was very quick at the uptake.

"Unhappily I didn't know John Oldmay as well as you appear to think," he said.

"You'll come?"

"Yes."

They met again two hours later at the barrier at King's Cross Station. Wickham led the way to his sleeping berth and ordered whiskies-and-soda. He invited the doctor to sit down in the solitary chair and seated himself on the bed.

"No fresh details have come through," he stated. "I went back to the Yard to get the latest

news. I'm sorry to say that the newspapers are already in possession of some of the facts, but they know nothing, happily, about the letter. I've been thinking over what you said about the exaggerated sense of smell and hearing. That would indicate, definitely, wouldn't it, that John's health was below par?"

"It might indicate that."

"Would an unfit man be more likely to get an inkling of murderous feelings brewing up against him than a fit man?"

Dr. Hailey frowned slightly. These questions, rapped out like blows, disconcerted him.

"Excited nerves," he said cautiously, "are more responsive than dull nerves. If John Oldmay's nervous system was capable of receiving impressions from some other human mind then, presumably, he would be more likely to receive such impressions when his nervous system was keyed to a high pitch. Presumably, too, a mind plotting a murder exerts a stronger influence than an untroubled mind."

"Apparatus of reception more sensitive; apparatus of transmission more powerful, eh?"

"You can put it that way if you like. The real question, though, is whether or not Oldmay was capable, in any circumstances, of receiving such impressions. The factor of coincidence cannot be excluded."

Wickham nodded agreement. He took a sip of whisky and then cut and lighted a cigar.

"John," he confessed, "was not the sort of man

you would expect to receive impressions, telepathic or other, from his fellows. He was singularly self-sufficient, even for a Scotsman, which is saying a lot. His business, I always thought, was more the product of his persistence, than his imagination. He didn't originate his business; that was done by his predecessor, old Matthew English. But hard, slogging work had turned a small into a great enterprise. English and Co., to-day, control the tea trade of the world. And yet . . ."

Wickham passed his hand across his brow.

"There's a mystery somewhere," he added, "in the make-up of every successful Scotsman."

The lights of a suburban station streamed past the windows of the compartment; the train roared into the long tunnel which carries the railway under the Northern heights of the Thames valley; sulphurous vapour stung the air. Wickham rose to shut the door leading to the corridor, which had swung open. At the same moment, Dr. Hailey, who was facing the door, saw a tall figure appear in the corridor.

"Carpenter!"

"What, you Wickham?"

Wickham shook the stranger's hand and then invited him to enter his sleeping berth. He introduced him to Dr. Hailey as "Professor Aloysius Carpenter, of King's College, John Oldmay's cousin."

"You're going to Pykewood, I take it?"

"Yes. Yes. Poor Gertrude sent me a telegram this morning."

Professor Carpenter took out his pocket-book as he spoke and extracted a telegram. He handed it to Wickham, who passed it on to the doctor. It announced: "John killed this morning. Suspect foul play. Please come."

"I rang up the Northumbrian police," Carpenter stated. "They told me that you have been communicated with and would probably deal personally with the case."

He shook his head as he spoke, but the expression of his face did not change. Seldom, Dr. Hailley thought, had he seen a human face so fixed in its expression as that of Professor Carpenter. The man bore an ill-defined likeness to King Charles I. He had the King's high, ample brow, his fineness of feature, his liveliness of gaze. But, though he wore beard and moustache trimmed in the Carolean manner, the likeness failed about the mouth and jaw. The lower part of Professor Carpenter's face belied the upper part. It might have belonged to a North-country farmer. His hands, on the contrary, were long and shapely, and endowed with much grace of movement. The doctor returned the telegram; he folded it carefully and replaced it in his pocket-book. Then he took an envelope from the pocket-book and handed it to Wickham.

"I received this letter to-day," he explained. "It is probably the last letter written by John Oldmay. I had intended to hand it to you to-morrow at Pykewood but there is no reason why you should not read it now."

The detective opened the letter and glanced at its contents. He raised his head sharply.

"May I read this aloud? Dr. Hailey has come to help me in the investigation."

"Certainly."

"The letter is dated 2 A.M. Monday. August 1st.

My dear Aloysius,

You told me once, long ago, that you believed every man was given some warning of the approach of death . . . even those men to whom death has appeared to come suddenly. I did not believe you at the time but I am writing to you now to tell you that I have changed my mind. During the last few hours the feeling has been continually present with me that I am about to die. Stranger still, I have a presentiment, which grows stronger, that my death will not be a natural one. I can best express this by saying that I feel hunted. Someone is driving me to destruction.

Naturally I have asked myself who this enemy can be. But no answer of any sort has been vouchsafed me. And yet I feel as one commonly feels when a name, well-known at other times, has faded temporarily from the memory. I know my enemy; I cannot name him. Further, I know why my death has been decreed, but I cannot, at this moment of time, recall the reason. Some time, somewhere, it may be long ago, it may be recently, my present danger was made clear to me. But I neglected the warning or overlooked it or perhaps refused to allow it to penetrate to my consciousness. It is like trying to remember, in an emergency at sea, what one was told about the correct way of wearing a life-belt. One has misplaced the knowledge or left it behind.

Was there a moment in my life when a glance from some hostile eye warned me that lively hate burned against me? I cannot remember. Did some chance expression, some trifling action or gesture convey somewhere the same message of danger? No, I have no recollection. I am blind at the very moment of my life when

all my senses seem to be possessed of a singular and astonishing acuity.

You and I have argued so long and so fruitlessly—if I may say it—about premonitions and telepathy and other similar alleged activities of the mind that I want to put my case in your hands before the event. (I have written in the same strain to Wickham of the C.I.D. so that there may be corroborative evidence.) If nothing happens, I shall call upon you to admit that even the most disturbing forebodings are but the manifestations of a disordered digestion. If what I fear happens, you will be in possession of a key which may unlock some doors. But even in that event do not, I beg of you, rush headlong to the conclusion that my mind was in metaphysical touch with the mind of my murderer. Remember what I have told you about that sense of a half-remembered warning and examine, first of all, the strictly physical possibilities. Find out, if you can, whether at any time in the past, my murderer and I were on terms of intimacy and whether or not there was any dispute between us. You see that the scientific habit of my mind is ineradicable even when, as now, I am in deadly fear.

I need not add that I have not shared these anxieties with Gertrude or Ned.

Your affectionate cousin,
JOHN OLDMAY"

Both Wickham and Carpenter turned to Dr. Hailey as Wickham finished reading.

"What do you make of it?" the Professor asked.

"It's extraordinarily clear."

"But surely quite abnormal. A normal man would have concerned himself with precautions for his safety—or called in a doctor."

"If he had really believed in his forebodings."

Carpenter's eyes opened widely.

"I had the impression of absolute conviction," he said.

CHAPTER III

THE FACTS OF THE CASE

PYKEWOOD HALL was one of those square, bare houses in which the squires of the early nineteenth century got drunk and bred big families. It looked like an orphans' home, also like a tavern; a formidable house, grim and ungarnished but not unlovely; a bull's neck of a house, with the joy of strength in it. The very place to found a cellar and a nursery. A landscape gardener, with an eye for contrast, had so warily surrounded it with lawns and flower beds, falling in terraces towards the sea, that it had grown mellow, like a blooded man come to genial, grand parenthood. This was John Oldmay's contribution.

The three men reached the house in an over-fed Daimler car which had been sent to meet Professor Carpenter. They were told by the butler that Lady Oldmay would receive them later and invited to "take" breakfast. The butler, whom Carpenter addressed as Nagge, gathered their hats and overcoats without noise, speedily, a performance singular from his age (sixty-seven) and great fatness. He was a middle-sized man, exuberant of body, with collops about the neck, and his cheeks, from their colour, suggested a point steak. The travellers, under his guidance, reached a lavatory that was full of the odours of costly soap, hot water and linen towels, these last folded in a

pile on the marble slab which contained the basin. When they had washed, he brought them to the dining-room.

This room was empty. But the table was spread and the sideboard furnished with a profusion of meats. Wickham's broad nostrils dilated to receive the smell of fried bacon, which later assailed them all, most generously when Nagge uncovered it. That smell overcame every other, but there were trout in oatmeal, and golden eggs scrambled on toast and a ham whose flavour bespoke the wine it had been boiled in. When a maidservant brought coffee and milk in silver pots, there was another aroma better than the rest.

"Commend me," said Wickham, "to a North-country breakfast."

Dr. Hailey satisfied himself that it was not possible from this room to hear the waves breaking; he watched the Scotch firs, that flanked the approach to the house, jostling one another in the morning breeze and then looked seaward, over the rampart of the dunes, which hid the beach. The path to the shore ran straight, under the firs, to the sandhills.

A man passed the windows, and rang the door-bell. When Nagge returned to the dining-room he told Wickham that Sergeant Robson of the local constabulary had come to the house.

"I informed him, sir, that you was taking breakfast."

Robson was a burly little man of the seafaring

type with a red face and bright eyes. Dr. Hailey felt sure that, in ordinary circumstances, he exhibited a boisterous manner; at present—in the squire's solemn study—his manner was subdued. The Northumbrian folk, like their neighbours across the Border, are mindful of death.

"Well," Wickham asked, "any progress, Sergeant?"

"None, sir. Things have moved very little."

Robson pronounced the word very "voy" and his voice rose in a crescendo till he had spoken the last word. Wickham introduced him to Dr. Hailey and then invited him to sit down. He offered his cigarette-case.

"Only a pipe, sir. I never was any hand with cigarettes."

"Tell us everything you know."

The scream of a sea bird brought uneasy memories of the dead man. Dr. Hailey strained his ears again to catch the sound of waves, but heard nothing. He glanced out of the window and saw Professor Carpenter standing, gloomily, under the fir trees.

"The first news we had that anything was wrong," Sergeant Robson said, "was a telephone message from the Hall here. It was her ladyship to say that Sir John had not come back from his morning swim and they were getting anxious about him. Could we get a boat and go to look for him."

"Who took the call?"

"Constable McDonald, sir."

"At the Pykewood station?"

"Yes, sir. Before he did anything, McDonald rang me up at Thorp. I told him to get a boat at once. He's waiting in the drive, sir, if you wish to question him."

"No. Carry on."

Sergeant Robson took a red silk handkerchief from his pocket and dried the inside of his collar. He blew through his lips exorcising too lively emotions.

"McDonald got two of the fishermen to row him round to the front of the Hall. Sea was calm and tide near high water. They having come opposite this house, they saw the body about fifty yards from the shore. Body wholly submerged, but floating."

Robson dried his collar again. He had spoken quickly, and had not forgotten a word. His brown hand, full of the handkerchief, rested on his knee.

"How was the body floating?" Wickham asked.

"On its face." Robson lowered his voice. "The top of the head was smashed in."

"You mean the back of the head?"

"No, sir. Top of the head. They dragged the body into the boat; the fingers of one hand had been smashed too ——"

"As if he had dived on to a sunken rock?" Dr. Hailey asked.

"Aye, dare say, but there's no sunken rocks on this beach. Sand, nothin' but sand. Miles of sand. There's no place to dive from and there's

no place to hurt yourself, supposin' you was able to dive."

"I see."

Robson turned to Wickham.

"Soon as I got the message, sir," he said, "I cycled over to Pykewood village. Left my bicycle at the police station and ran along the shore. Had just reached the boat-house of Pykewood Hall when I saw them lifting the body out of the water. Shouted to them and they told me what they had found, so I ordered them to bring the body ashore. Meantime, had a look at the sand. Tide was coming up, but it still wanted about ten yards of high water. There, sure enough, on the soft sand were the marks of Sir John's feet going down to the water from the place where he had left his dressing-gown and shoes and towel. No other marks on the sand that I could see."

"Do you mean on the sand below high water?" Wickham asked.

"Yes, sir. Above high water sand is deep and soft; covered with footmarks it is because everyone staying here bathes from that place on the shore. It's only the sand below high water that can tell you anything; tide makes a clean slate of it, so to speak."

"Quite."

"When the boat came to the jetty I made an inspection of the body. Then I sent a messenger to Dr. Jordan of Pykewood and came here myself to break the news to her ladyship. Dr. Jordan

examined the body within two hours of its reaching this house."

Robson's self-confidence was returning. He leaned back in his chair and crossed his short legs in the manner of a candidate at a political meeting making ready to answer questions.

"When exactly was Sir John's body found?" Wickham asked.

"Here you are, sir," Robson pulled back the lapel of his tightly buttoned jacket with his left hand and plunged his right hand into his breast pocket. He produced an inconvenient-looking note-book and ruffled its leaves.

"The body," he read, "was discovered by Constable McDonald and his party at 9.10 A.M. exactly. It was lifted into the boat at 9.12 or 9.13. I have ascertained that Sir John must have entered the water about 7.30 A.M. He was a man very regular in his habits and always took his morning bathe at that time. Lady Oldmay told me she heard him moving about in his room at the usual hour—between seven and the half-past."

"She went to the beach herself, didn't she?"

"I was coming to that. Here you are. 'When Sir John didn't come back to the house, Lady Oldmay went out to look for him. She met her son, Mr. Edward Oldmay, coming up from the boat-house, and they walked to the bathing-place together. That would be about eight o'clock, because breakfast at the Hall is eight o'clock sharp. Sir John's towel, dressing-gown and shoes were lying on the beach. But there was no sign of himself.

The towel was dry. Mr. Edward Oldmay ran to the boat-house and rowed about for more than half an hour; but failed to find his father's body. Her ladyship telephoned to the police while Mr. Edward was searching.' "

Wickham tapped his brow with his finger. "Did the doctor find any blood on the bathing-suit?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"The sea would wash blood away, wouldn't it?"

"Possibly."

"It had washed the wounds on the head and hands quite clean. There was wonderful little blood on the wounds."

The door of the room opened. A tall woman, dressed in deep mourning, entered.

CHAPTER IV

LADY OLD MAY

LADY OLD MAY'S entry made the library seem smaller. This was not due, wholly, to the fact that she was a tall, big woman; her presence absorbed space by concentrating attention.

She was blonde, in the American sense, of a conspicuous and singular whiteness, so active in its quality that it seemed to proceed from her to the objects in her neighbourhood. Her flesh, as Dr. Hailey noted, had preserved its firmness and her eyes their lustre. But she did not look healthy. Beauty mending its rags sometimes gives that impression. He glanced at her hands. They were strong and supple; but the skin had lost its bloom. She was sixty.

"It's so kind of you, dear Colonel Wickham," she said in a clear voice. Her infant-like eyes turned to Dr. Hailey, but failed to recognize him. Wickham introduced him.

"Dr. Hailey," he said, "was a friend of John's."

"I know, of course."

Aristocracy, the doctor reflected, as he watched Lady Oldmay sit down, is imperishable, a stubborn distillation which, like wine, levies toll on the years. This woman, in her distress, invited no sympathy, but rendered thanks without reckoning for the sympathy given to her. Wickham spoke in an undertone to Robson who left the room at once.

He watched the door till it shut and then turned, with expectation in his face.

"I felt," Lady Oldmay said, "that I should like to tell you what I know, while I have the strength to tell you. The shock has been very great, and my nerves are never entirely trustworthy."

She held the arms of her chair as though, already, she felt the beginnings of a reaction which, evidently, she foresaw, but sat erect, taking no ease from the chair's back. Calamity had not abated custom; the powder on her cheeks bespoke an unhurried discretion. She wore a single string of pearls as her only ornament.

"I noticed yesterday morning," she said, "that John wasn't himself. His life, as you know, was a time-table and his mind was as punctual as the habits it had made. The minute he came back from his bathe he used to come into my bedroom to wish me good morning, and tell me how fresh the wind smelt on the dunes. He said that almost every morning in summer. Yesterday morning he didn't come near me until the gong went for breakfast and then he told me that he wished I wouldn't use such 'heavy scents.' "

Lady Oldmay moved slightly in her chair.

"I use the very smallest quantities of scent," she stated. "And have never, at any time, used any but the faintest. It was the first time that John had offered such a criticism. I was surprised, and hurt. I could scarcely believe my ears. I asked him what he meant. He looked at me vacantly and then drew his hand across his brow: 'Is it the

powder that smells so strong?' he asked. 'You know that I always use the same powder.' 'It smells very strong.' At breakfast he inquired whether any of us could hear the waves falling on the beach. Nobody could hear them but he said that he heard them quite distinctly. When Ned suggested that he must be mistaken, he became quite violently angry—a most unusual thing."

"Do you think that he really did hear the waves?" Dr. Hailey asked.

"Oh no, impossible. His nephew, Dyke Duxford, who is staying with us and who studied medicine before he became an actor, explained it by saying that sometimes one hears the blood throbbing in one's arteries. The sound is like waves falling on a beach. John accepted that idea and calmed down after a little. But I think that, at the back of his mind, he still believed he was hearing the waves.

"He had an appointment with one of his tenants in Pykewood village and walked over there in the afternoon. I offered to go with him but he refused to allow me. 'I feel,' he said, 'that if you came, we should quarrel.' I leave you to imagine the terrible effect of this harshness on my feelings. I was not so much distressed as terrified. Caroline will tell you that I felt sure then that her father was either seriously unwell or undergoing some terrible mental strain. When he came home, just before dinner, my fears were confirmed. He looked desperately ill."

Lady Oldmay's right hand moved to her necklace. She grasped the pearls in tense fingers.

"He was extremely pale, and there was a yellow tinge in his skin which alarmed me more than the pallor itself. His eyes were bloodshot and his face had a strange puffy look which I have never seen before. I begged him to let me send for Dr. Jordan but he refused. He kept saying: 'I never felt better in my life.' Dyke, who saw him at dinner, agreed with me that he looked most unwell. 'I only hope he isn't taking typhoid fever,' he said. 'It sometimes begins like that. I suppose your water-supply is above suspicion?' After dinner he was in the habit of reading in this room. About eleven o'clock I came to him and found him sitting at that desk with his head between his hands. He looked up when I came into the room and the expression on his face made me catch my breath. 'Am I as bad as all that, Gertrude?' he asked me. He tried to smile, for he was very brave. He took my hand and gazed into my face; after a little he told me that he felt greatly depressed. 'More depressed than I have ever felt before.' I asked him what he was worrying about, but he only shook his head. 'Everything, nothing. I feel . . . that life is short.' Suddenly his eyes flashed, a wild, terrible look came upon his face. I was full of fear. I stayed with him till nearly midnight and then left him only because he said he had some important letters to write. I heard him come to bed long afterwards and then I fell asleep.

This morning I heard him leave his bedroom at the usual time to go out for his bathe."

Her hands fluttered down to her lap and lay there twitching. But it was difficult to say if she had tears in her eyes because they held tears in any case.

"Did John mention any name?" Wickham asked.

"No. None. He would give me no information of any kind who or what was troubling him."

"And you have no idea yourself?"

Wickham leaned forward slightly, betraying the cloven hoof of his calling. It was quickly done, quickly undone, but Dr. Hailey thought he saw the infantile eyes harden. Lady Oldmay had her wits about her.

"I have no idea. So far as I know John's affairs are in order. I'm sure he had no enemies."

"Money?"

She shook her head.

"Oh no."

"It is generally believed he was worth four or five millions."

"I can't say."

Wickham took a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles from his pocket and put them on. He seemed to grow more solemn and a heavy flush arrived in his cheeks.

"Your relations with your husband?" he asked.

The woman remained unembarrassed.

"We were friends," she said with excellent candour, "because we had both outlived the time when

we had been lovers. John was seventy-five. We had our share of difficulties but my life with him was happy and I think he would have said the same of his life with me."

Her tones were clear and earnest. Dr. Hailey felt an alacrity of conviction which no exaggeration could have achieved. Truth, he reflected, is its own advertisement.

"Were Ned and Caroline on good terms with their father?"

"Yes." Lady Oldmay moved her right hand in a small, restrained gesture. "They annoyed him sometimes, I suppose," she said. "They possess my temperament rather than his."

Her hand came to rest again on her lap. Only by the slightest inflection of her voice had she emphasized the words, "my temperament," but those words held the substance of her reply.

"It would help if you could be a little more explicit."

"John was a Scottish minister's son; my people are English."

She spoke quickly. They knew that she was the Duke of Greenshire's granddaughter.

"Ned and Caroline haven't inherited their father's capacity for business?"

She shook her head.

"Ned and Caroline understand spending money better than making it. They're headstrong, they're fond of their own way; they're eager to enjoy themselves. John had difficulty in sympathizing with their point of view."

Dr. Hailey leaned forward.

"That might mean," he said, "that your son distressed his father by getting into debt."

Lady Oldmay's body stiffened; she turned and faced the doctor, staring at him.

"It doesn't mean that."

"Forgive me, I said only that it might mean it."

She bit her underlip; the knuckles of both her hands blanched. She turned to Wickham.

"You know what a horror John had of debts," she exclaimed. "You know that Ned would not have dared to tell his father he had contracted any."

She rose. Her eyelids drooped over her eyes but the doctor observed a gleam of anger.

"I can't see what bearing such a suggestion can have on my husband's death," she added in tones of resentment.

CHAPTER V

THE BRASS ROWLOCK

"WHY did you make that suggestion about Ned being in debt, my dear Hailey?" Wickham asked the doctor when Lady Oldmay left them.

"I didn't; the suggestion, as I pointed out, came from Lady Oldmay herself; I underlined it."

"Um."

"She excused her son, therefore accused him."

Wickham's face assumed its blank expression.

"Ned wouldn't dare to tell his father he was in debt," he said. "John thought of debt as other men think of stealing."

"So that if there were debts Lady Oldmay has paid them."

Wickham frowned slightly.

"Possibly. I don't think she's got much of her own. Still I've no doubt she would try her utmost to shield Ned from his father. Without being a snob, she can't forget that she married beneath her. Ned belongs to her people, not to John's. I may be wrong but I believe that many of the vices exhibited by young men can be traced back to the influence of their mothers. Did you notice how her voice changed when she was telling us that her children understood the spending of money better than the making of it? Her menfolk have always been fighters and hunters, not shopkeepers."

"What sort of fellow is Ned?"

"I don't think he's a bad boy. A bit effeminate-looking. But the Greenshires all look like girls till they're thirty. It's a tough sort of prettiness, though. Toughest there is. His uncles were known in the Quorn country as the 'angels on horseback'; and he's another, with John's dour blood thrown into the bargain."

Wickham got up and rang the bell.

"I want you to look at the body," he said, "before we talk to anybody else."

He remained standing till Nagge came into the room.

"Ask Sergeant Robson to see me."

"Very good, sir."

They climbed the stair behind the policeman who mounted with short sharp steps, like a turkey-cock. He turned the handle of the door facing the staircase and pushed the door wide open. He stood at attention, with his back to the door, until they had entered the room, when he closed the door behind them. The room was full of sunlight, which made the narrow, sheeted figure in the bed look insignificant. Dr. Hailey walked to the bed and lifted the face cloth. It seemed to him that Sir John's features retained an expression of dismay but it was hard to be sure. The old man's face was not bound; his short beard and heavy moustache hid the lines of death. He bent to examine the injuries to the head and then glanced at the hands. He took one of the hands in his own and manipulated it for a few moments. Then he

pressed his finger on the wound in the scalp. He returned to the door where Wickham stood waiting for him.

"The skull has been smashed like an eggshell," he said. "Two of the fingers of the right hand are broken. The assault was determined, sudden, savage. Several blows were struck."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes. There are at least two holes in the skull." Dr. Hailey took an envelope from his pocket and made a rapid sketch at which Wickham barely glanced.

"The broken fingers prove that Sir John was aware suddenly of what was coming," he explained. "They prove, too, that he was defenceless and that his assailant used a terrific violence, such as men display when under the influence of commanding emotion."

"Fear?"

"Terror, most probably. Those murders in which wounds continue to be inflicted after death are always committed by panic-stricken people. We must look, I think, for someone whose nerve Sir John—or somebody else—had broken."

Wickham did not reply. Dr. Hailey added after a moment:

"Fear which drives to murder is never ordinary fear, and it is never shown by ordinary people. The coward who kills always has a guilty conscience. He kills to avoid not only the danger which is present and immediate but the danger which habitually haunts his mind. An example

that occurs to me was a confidential secretary who, on being detected in extensive fraud, battered his employer to death. The guilt that had been snarling at the fellow for years was unleashed. Stampede followed and in stampede the murder was done. The odds are this is such another case. Murder by panic and therefore sudden, blind, unheeding."

Wickham shrugged his shoulders. Reasoning of this kind had small attraction for him.

"Don't forget John was killed while bathing," he remarked. "The circumstances hardly suggest that he inspired fear in anybody at that moment."

They left the room and returned to the study. Dr. Jordan of Pykewood was awaiting them. He announced that he had just been instructed by the Coroner to make a post-mortem examination. He was a man with a short, reddish beard and a brisk manner. The kind of man who gets things done, but not, as a rule, very well done.

"There's no doubt," he declared, "that poor John was most brutally assaulted. I fancy he was killed by the first blow—for I'm ready to bet he got several blows. There was mighty little bleeding. I put the place of the murder a few yards from shore, somewhere within his depth. John took that first blow standing; it wouldn't have had the same effect if he'd been swimming. I saw his footmarks going down across the soft sand. I walked half a mile each side of them to see if there were any others, because the tide was coming up and there was no time to lose. Sergeant

Robson had done the same thing before. There wasn't so much as a scratch on the sand anywhere else, from the boat-house to the Breamish brook. You see the inference. John was killed by somebody in a boat."

Jordan lowered his voice as he imparted this view. It was apparent that he was pleased with himself. He walked quickly to the door of the room and opened it. He closed it again carefully and then returned. He put his hand into one of his pockets.

"I decided," he stated, "to do a piece of detective work on my own account. The police examined the two boats in the boat-house but I didn't feel satisfied with the way they conducted this examination. After they had finished I asked permission to take the rowlocks of one of the boats—only one of the boats has removable rowlocks—home with me. I made a discovery."

He took a parcel from his pocket as he spoke and laid it on the desk. He opened the paper and disclosed a brass rowlock. He invited Wickham to look at a black spot on the metal:

"That's blood," he announced, "and there's a bit of white hair sticking to the clot."

His voice rang triumphantly. He raised his head and looked Wickham straight in the face.

"It's a mighty small clue, I'll admit," he declared. "But then we have to remember that the murder was committed afloat. The murderer of course washed his weapon immediately, by plunging it in the sea. He reckoned he had removed

every trace of his crime. Unless you look for that spot you aren't likely to find it. It's no wonder that, in the state of mind he must have been in, he should have overlooked it. I think that blood clot got entangled in a roughened place on the metal."

He paused to draw breath.

"I've ascertained," he added in grave tones, "that Ned Oldmay went out early this morning to lift a night-line. He was back in the house here before eight o'clock."

CHAPTER VI

DYKE DUXFORD

WICKHAM possessed an exact mind in which ideas of order predominated. It had been his experience that if an inquiry was not kept in hand it soon broke down.

Important therefore as Dr. Jordan's discovery appeared to be, its value was reduced in his eyes because it had been thrust upon him. His face expressed objection rather than enthusiasm.

"I think," he said, "that in the special circumstances of this case, it would have been better, doctor, had you not removed the rowlocks from the boat-house."

"My dear sir, I had the permission of the police to remove them."

"No doubt."

Jordan flushed angrily but managed to keep his temper. He hesitated for a moment, glanced at Dr. Hailey as if he expected to receive a lead and then strode out of the room.

"We've got to keep clear heads," Wickham remarked, "and that fellow would have muddled them in no time."

"He's upset, I'm afraid."

Wickham shrugged his shoulders.

"I refuse to be bounced by anybody. I'm going through the evidence step by step, man by man, in alphabetical order, with no preconceived ideas."

He rang the bell as he spoke. "This suggestion that a boat was used is exactly the kind of shot that we've got to avoid. It's a theory ready-made; the next step is always to prove the theory, as Jordan has been trying to do. Truth goes begging when that happens."

Dr. Hailey nodded. But if he agreed with the detective, he felt some sympathy for his colleague. The method of the "unbiased mind" in detective work as in scientific investigation has, he knew only too well, this fatal weakness that it leads to the accumulation of evidence but not necessarily to the proper understanding of it. Even a bad theory may be better than no theory at all. He sat down in an arm-chair near the desk and occupied himself reading the titles of the books on the shelves opposite. He saw the Waverley novels and Dickens and Thackeray, herded like the deer in a gentleman's park. Sir John Oldmay had read little, keeping books for his friends just as he kept boats and horses and wine and cigars for them. But he had possessed the practical man's sense of what is due to learning and the Scotsman's liking for good bindings to offset the modern article as received from the lending library. Its books, however, were the owner's least claim to interest. Sir John, if no literary man, was apparently a bit of an antiquarian. He had hung the vacant places on his walls with formidable looking weapons deriving possibly from Border battlefields. There were axes and pikes and broadswords and a helmet complete with visor. All these tro-

Duxford displayed the palm of his right hand with fingers extended. His wonder that a man over seventy years of age could be so active, was by this means made excellently clear.

"Did you observe any changes in him during the past few days?"

"Oh, yes. He'd been out of sorts for three days at least. Restless. Nervous. Fidgety. Irritable." Duxford raised his head, displaying his broad throat. "The day before yesterday his senses seemed to be hyperæsthetic. He assured us he could smell all sorts of things at long distances; and he got very angry when Ned doubted if he could really hear the waves on the beach from this house."

"How did you interpret that sign?"

"I thought he might be sickening for some illness."

"Any special illness?"

"Possibly typhoid fever. One gets symptoms of that sort in the early stages."

Wickham turned to Dr. Hailey.

"You agree?"

"Yes."

"Would the beginnings of an illness of that sort affect the patient's mind?"

"I think so."

Wickham made a note. While he was writing Duxford lit a cigarette. He blew the smoke he had inhaled away from him in the manner of a man ridding himself of cobwebs.

"Is your bedroom situated near Sir John's?" the detective asked.

"No."

"Is it on the same floor?"

"Oh, yes."

"Did you hear your uncle come up to bed on the night before he was killed?"

"No."

"Did you hear him go out for his bathe on the following morning?"

"No, but I saw him leaving the house."

"From your bedroom window?"

"Yes."

"How was he dressed?"

"In his dressing-gown. He always went down to the shore in his bathing costume."

"Did you see him reach the shore?"

Duxford shook his head.

"You can't see the shore from this house. The dunes hide it. As it happened I was going 'cubbing' with the Percy Pack. I was almost dressed when I saw my uncle. I went downstairs immediately afterwards and walked to the stables. I rode along the dunes but didn't see him again."

Wickham frowned.

"Not so fast. What time was it when you saw your uncle leave the house?"

"About 7.30."

"About? Can't you be more precise?"

"I looked at my watch when I woke. It was seven o'clock. It takes me about half an hour to shave and have my bath."

"How long did you spend at the stables?"

"Only a minute or two. My horse was waiting for me."

"So that you probably reached the dunes about a quarter to eight?"

"There or thereabouts."

"Did you look for your uncle?"

"Not really. I was rather in a hurry to join the hounds, for I was very late. I glanced seaward and I remember wondering where the old man was. I thought he must have come ashore."

"Did you find the hounds?"

"Yes. They were on the dunes about three miles away. I didn't get back here till nearly eleven."

Wickham leaned forward, fixing his eyes on Duxford's face.

"Now tell me, did you see a boat near the bathing-place when you rode along the dunes?"

He continued to gaze at Duxford. Dr. Hailey saw the young man close his eyes suddenly. He kept them closed for a moment, and then, reluctantly as it seemed, opened them. If he had seen he had forgotten.

"I have no special recollection."

"Take care."

"I have no special recollection."

Duxford's eyes were now wide open. They were dark eyes with a hazel streak in them. Their expression was vague, dreamy.

"You have told us that you looked seaward. If there was a boat in the bay you must have seen it."

"No doubt, as one sees the leaves on a tree."

The rebuke was uttered with a gesture which challenged the detective to show his hand and which, in addition, discounted any hand that he might show. Duxford accompanied his gesture with a smile and Wickham looked nonplussed.

"I warn you," he declared angrily, "that sooner or later you will be compelled to tell the truth."

He leaned across the desk. Duxford threw his cigarette into the fireplace and then, with a flourish, opened his gold case again. He held the case out to Wickham. When the detective refused it he shut it with a snap.

"Did you notice," he asked quietly, "in which side of my case the only gold-tipped cigarette it contains is situated?"

"What do you mean?"

"You have just looked at my case and its contents. There's a gold-tipped cigarette in it, conspicuous because it is the only one of its kind. Can you tell me on which side of the case that cigarette is situated?"

Wickham scowled but did not reply.

"One sees what one looks for," Duxford remarked.

The detective wrote and then raised his head.

"I am recording the fact that you have shown reluctance to answer my question about the boat."

"I suggest that you add that, at a quarter to eight on that particular morning, the idea that my uncle had been murdered was not present to my mind."

Wickham closed his note-book and then, immediately, reopened it.

"Did you meet anybody on your way from this house to the dunes?" he asked.

"Nobody."

"Did you see anybody?"

"No, my horse was rather fresh and I was kept busy holding him."

"Have you any questions, my dear Hailey?"

Dr. Hailey had his snuff-box in his hand. He took a pinch reflectively.

"You have appeared, haven't you," he inquired of the young man, "in a number of films in which good horsemanship was made a special attraction?"

"Yes. I've ridden since I was a child."

"And trained horses too?"

"Oh yes, a few."

"The horse you rode to hounds belonged, I suppose, to your uncle?"

"No. It belongs to me."

"One of those you trained yourself?"

"Yes."

Dr. Hailey closed his eyes and then opened them again.

"Where do you train your horses?" he asked.

"At my place at Shenley in Hertfordshire. I brought this particular horse to the north to complete his education."

A note of enthusiasm crept into Duxford's voice. "He's the best hunter I've ever possessed. Jumps like a stag."

Wickham dismissed Duxford with a warning that it was probable he would be summoned again before the investigation ended.

"Do you believe," he asked Dr. Hailey, "that he did notice if there was a boat in the bay?"

"I'm afraid I don't know him well enough to answer that question."

"A boat on water is about the most conspicuous object in this world. One sees it if it is there."

Dr. Hailey did not reply. The point, as he conceived, lay beyond the region of argument. He met Wickham's comment that Duxford was no doubt concerned to divert suspicion away from his cousin with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Why should he suspect his cousin?"

"He knew that Ned had gone to lift his night-line. Members of a family tend to shield one another—like thieves."

The next witness summoned to the library was Caroline Oldmay, Sir John's eighteen-year-old daughter, a girl who had inherited her mother's good looks. The colour of her hair, a deep copper tint, was not less striking, Dr. Hailey thought, than the pallor of her skin, beneath which the lively blood glowed like light behind a curtain. Her expression, in spite of its gentleness, was proud and reserved. Wickham's manner softened perceptibly as he introduced her to Dr. Hailey and invited her to sit down.

"I'm deeply sorry to have to distress you further," he apologized, "but it's essential that I

should have your answers to a number of questions. I know you'll realize that."

Caroline didn't answer. Her lips were pressed together and her hands, though she tried to control them, moved restlessly in her lap. Wickham glanced at his notes and then raised his head sharply.

"Were you present," he asked, "when your father said that he could hear the waves on the beach while sitting in this house?"

"Yes, I was."

"You could not hear the waves yourself?"

"No."

"Was your father quite positive that it was the waves he was hearing?"

"Oh, yes, quite sure."

"Do you remember if any explanation of this curious idea was offered at the time?"

"My cousin suggested that my father might be listening to the throbbing of the blood in his own arteries. I don't think that my father really accepted that explanation."

"Now tell me," Wickham leaned forward, "did you notice any change in your father's manner on the day before he met his death?"

The girl glanced about her uneasily.

"I thought he seemed upset," she said in low tones.

"Did he tell you why he was upset?"

"No."

"Have you any idea why he was upset?"

Caroline wilted visibly. She did not answer.

"I'm very sorry to distress you," Wickham said, "but I think that you must tell me everything you know, no matter how difficult it may be to tell me."

"My father was apt to get upset about . . . family affairs."

The words were spoken with difficulty and the speaker kept her eyes fixed on the carpet.

"Such as?"

"Any family affair."

"But on this particular occasion?"

She looked up.

"I would rather not discuss this subject with you," she said.

Her manner was neither defiant nor resentful. She fell back on her sex and social advantage with an assurance which proved how confident she felt in their strength.

"Pardon me, you must discuss it."

She flushed; her eyes glowed. She stammered refusal and then the weakness of youth betrayed her. Tears rushed to her eyes. She jumped up and hurried from the room.

She left the door of the room open behind her.

CHAPTER VII

NED OLDMAY

WICKHAM rose and closed the door. He began to pace up and down with strides which made his legs seem too short for his thoughts. He kept throwing out angry remarks as he walked.

"What do you advise, Hailey? Shall I send for her again?"

"I shouldn't."

"Women are the very dickens when they have their own reasons for not wishing to speak. I've found that again and again. You can't frighten them as you can frighten men."

He strode to the door and back again.

"I'm beginning to think that the last day of John Oldmay's life was spent in conducting a family quarrel. And I'm ready to bet that Ned was the principal occasion of that quarrel. John had the Scotsman's horror of riotous living. Sons who sow wild oats in Scotland are apt to find themselves under the necessity of reaping the same."

He returned to his seat at the desk.

"How well did you know John Oldmay?" he asked suddenly.

"No better than a doctor usually knows his patients. He consulted me at pretty regular intervals for some years. I met him socially two or three times."

"And yet he mentioned in that letter to me that he would like to have written to you."

"Oh, yes. He always discussed his soul when he came to Harley Street. Men of his type, I've observed, have a weakness for making such confidences. Doctors exercise a special attraction for them, because doctors are supposed to be men of science as well as philosophers and men of the world. A practical man may confess himself to a doctor without losing his self-respect."

Dr. Hailey paused and assumed his eyeglass.

"Well?" Wickham demanded.

"John Oldmay was of fixed ideas, for whom life was an affair of blacks and whites, of right and wrong, of good and bad, a man colour-blind in the moral sense and therefore incapable of appreciating shades of conduct. He was a just man, but his justice was almost untempered by mercy. Moreover, he possessed a lively faith in the efficacy of punishment as a regenerating influence. No matter how unpleasant a course of action might be, he could be counted on to take it, and to follow it to the bitter end, if it seemed to promise the reclamation of a sinner. No doubt his father's Calvinism was responsible. The fatalism of the doctrine of Election imbibed in the nursery had darkened his mind and his scientific bias reacted back on his fatalism. All men of scientific mind are fatalists at heart. But John Oldmay had, in addition, the Scotsman's sense of the responsibility attaching to money, which is a mixture of satisfaction in the possession of

wealth and of fear that, if a bad use is made of it, it may be taken away. Debts contracted in the pursuit of pleasure constitute for such minds the unpardonable sin."

Wickham nodded. Then a frown gathered on his brow.

"In other words if John discovered that Ned had been going the pace, he probably threatened to cut off supplies."

"I should say that it is even more probable that he threatened to turn his son out of doors to earn his own living. I doubt very much, too, if he would leave such a son a penny of his money. That was what I had in mind when I questioned Lady Oldmay. My experience is there's no more bitter form of dispute than that in which a woman tries to shelter her son from her husband's anger. Lady Oldmay, besides, was half-ashamed of her husband's virtues and secretly proud of her son's faults."

"I think," Wickham said, "that we had better see Ned Oldmay."

Ned proved as good-looking as his sister but in a different way. He was tall, slightly built and fair. There was a cherubic quality in his face, a mixture of charm with carelessness. Enjoyment radiated from him and his blue eyes held the smoky sparkle of champagne. He came into the room diffidently and left the door open.

"Do you mind closing the door?" Wickham suggested in his driest tone.

"I'm most awfully sorry, sir."

Ned turned back and closed the door so quietly that the operation was unattended by sound. He crossed the floor and sat down opposite his father's desk. His manner, as he awaited Wickham's pleasure, was so modest as to approach nearly to insult. But it was obvious that this was a fault of temperament rather than intention. He was his mother's son.

"A short time ago you were heavily in debt, I think?"

Ned raised his eyebrows and then made a small grimace. He sighed.

"Am I to answer, Colonel Wickham?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I consider it necessary that you should answer."

"Very well, sir, a short time ago I was heavily in debt."

"Who paid your debts?"

"They were paid."

"Please answer my question."

The boy's face darkened. He remained silent, with his lips tightly compressed as though he fortified himself to refuse further information. Wickham tapped on the desk with the butt end of his fountain-pen.

"I have reason to believe that your mother paid your debts, am I right?"

"I think you must ask my mother that question."

"Without your father's knowledge?"

"Excuse me, sir, but I don't quite see the bearing of all this. Are you suggesting that my debts are connected in any way with my father's death?"

"I am here to inquire into the circumstances of your father's death . . . for that purpose and no other."

"I see, sir. Very well, then, I'll answer your questions." Ned stiffened in his chair. His mouth grew hard.

"My mother did pay my debts and my father knew nothing about it until three days before his death, when he found out what had happened."

"Was he very angry?"

"Exceedingly angry. On the day before his death he told me that I should have to work for my own living and that he refused to leave me a penny of his money."

The words were spoken in matter-of-fact tones and without emphasis. Ned seemed concerned neither to blame his father nor to defend himself. A look of surprise appeared on Wickham's face.

"Well?"

"That's all. My mother, of course, was upset."

"You mean that you didn't take your father seriously?"

For the first time Ned betrayed astonishment.

"I understood, sir, that you knew my father?" he remarked.

"I did, yes."

"He never threatened without fulfilling his threats, sir."

"I see. Your mother meant to provide for you. . . ."

"My mother always accepted my father's decisions. I was to go into an office in London."

"Immediately?"

"Yes, sir."

Wickham wrote rapidly for a few minutes.

"Please tell me about yesterday morning—what you were doing."

"I rose at seven and went out to lift a night-line I had put down the night before."

"In a boat?"

A very faint smile appeared on the young man's lips.

"Yes, in a boat."

"When did you return to the house?"

"Just before breakfast, about eight o'clock. We have breakfast at a quarter-past eight."

"When did you land at the boat-house?"

"About ten minutes or a quarter of an hour earlier."

Wickham leaned forward.

"So that you were within a short distance of the bathing-place at the time when your father was actually in the water?"

"I suppose so. I didn't see anything of him."

"Did you look for him?"

Ned hesitated a moment.

"I did, yes," he stated at last.

"Well?"

"I didn't see him."

Wickham frowned.

"And yet you returned here as if nothing had happened?"

"How could I know that anything had happened?"

"What, when you had failed to see your father? You knew he bathed at the same time each day."

The young man shook his head.

"He wasn't so absolutely regular as all that. It didn't occur to me to feel anxious about him."

"I see." The detective closed his note-book. "One other question. Did you observe your cousin, Dyke Duxford, while you were returning to the boat-house?"

"Yes, I saw him riding along the dunes. He was going cubbing."

"Did he see you?"

"Yes, he waved to me."

CHAPTER VIII

"NOT GUILTY"

WICKHAM began to pace the room again as soon as Ned Oldmay had left it.

"There are the facts, Hailey," he declared speaking in staccato sentences. "The blood and hair on the rowlock. The quarrel between father and son. The plight of the son. The son's presence, in a boat, in a boat, mark you, at the time of the father's murder. We are accustomed to ask ourselves three questions about all such cases. Who? Why? How? There are answers to all three."

"I usually ask myself one other question," Dr. Hailey said. "It lacks the merit of being capable of expression in a word."

"Yes?" The detective turned sharply.

"The question is: 'What manner of man?'"

"What manner of man?"

"This is a brutal murder, a ferocious murder. You must find these traits—brutality and ferocity—in your murderer, surely."

"Oh, my dear sir, all men are capable of brutality, just as all men are capable of fear."

The doctor shook his head.

"That has not been my experience, and it is not the experience of humanity. Fear, as the whole world knows, sorts out one man from another. There are those who collapse; there are those who run away; there are those who become violent

and brutal and there are those who retain their self-control. Very well, to which of these categories does Ned belong?"

"How should I know?"

"You've seen him; you've questioned him. What impression did you get?"

Dr. Hailey spoke in his habitual, gentle tones, but his voice had an eager quality which made his question a challenge.

"Oh, the impression I had before. That he's a rich man's son. It's obvious, isn't it?"

"That depends on how you define a rich man's son. Ned answered you frankly and clearly. He must have known in what direction your questions were tending. Did he try to excuse himself?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"How could he excuse himself? Facts are facts."

"He might easily have described his quarrel with his father in less uncompromising terms. Probably only his mother and sister knew anything about it and you have seen how they acted."

Wickham shook his head. His smile repudiated the idea that he could be led away from a practical to a theoretical issue. He picked up the rowlock which Dr. Jordan had left on the desk.

"I'm going to have this examined by our own people," he declared. "Do you care to come with me to the boat-house?"

"I think not."

Wickham went away with Sergeant Robson. Dr. Hailey asked to be shown his bedroom and

was taken upstairs by Nagge, whose solemn appearance did not completely hide his agitation. The room commanded an extensive view of the sea and he sat down at the window to enjoy it. He could just see the roof of the boat-house and concluded that any craft leaving there would come, almost at once, under the observation of all the windows on this side of Pykewood Hall. He took a pinch of snuff and then proceeded to unpack his suit-case. In one of the pockets of the case was a small bottle containing a straw-coloured liquid. He put it in his pocket and descended to the front door. There was nobody about. He walked round the house to the stables, which were close at hand, and stood looking with approving eyes at the excellent loose-boxes which occupied two sides of the wide square. A groom was polishing harness; he approached the man and told him to show him Dyke Duxford's hunter.

"Have you been looking after the horse yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you like him?"

"Very well, sir, very well."

"Quiet?"

"Oh, yes, sir; very quiet."

The man opened one of the boxes and stood back to allow the doctor to enter. The horse, a big bay, was standing at the far side, but immediately approached. It placed its hoofs saucily in the deep bedding and thrust out its neck.

"Mr. Duxford gives him sugar, sir."

Dr. Hailey patted the horse and then passed his hands rapidly over its sides and down its forelegs. Something on its right knee attracted his notice. He bent down and, having taken a pair of scissors from his pocket, cut off a few hairs. He placed these in his bottle. He was corking the bottle when Duxford spoke to him from the door.

"Hullo, doctor, what are you doing?"

Duxford entered the box and patted his horse's neck. But he kept his eyes fixed on the straw-coloured fluid in Dr. Hailey's bottle. The smile with which he was accustomed to meet the perils attending love-affairs in desert places, beamed on his face.

"Answering a question."

"What, about my horse?"

Duxford's arm went up round the animal's neck in a movement which seemed to shield a friend from harm.

"You forget I'm a doctor, you know," he said. "I recognize that bottle."

He left the horse and accompanied Dr. Hailey from the loose-box.

"There isn't any blood on 'Sahib's' coat," he declared. "Not even your microspectroscope will be able to find any." He drew a sharp breath. "So you thought I might have ridden down poor Uncle John in the water?"

Duxford's voice hardened as he asked the question, but he did not cease to smile. When he received no reply he shrugged his shoulders.

"I might have, of course," he said. "I dare say

Sahib would have his part. And the rising tide would have removed all the traces. What an ingenious mind you possess, Dr. Hailey! On the other hand, wouldn't it have been a trifle risky—in full view of the house? A horse plunging about in the sea would be apt to attract even more attention than a boat, and besides, could you guarantee success? What if Uncle John had lived to tell the tale? I can assure you that the cinema demands a higher degree of efficiency in its villains than that."

He paused. His eyes were jolly and the blood had mounted to his cheeks. Dr. Hailey beheld him through his eyeglass.

"That idea had not occurred to me," he stated coldly.

"Really! But you're about to test for blood." Duxford's face assumed a puzzled expression and then, suddenly, cleared. "Oh, I see. You thought I might have overtaken the old man where the dunes hide the beach from the windows, and then carried his body, on my horse, into the water. There would be blood on Sahib's coat, of course." He paused, gazing at the doctor with his best look of scorn. "How about the footprints?"

The benevolence of Dr. Hailey's expression had not changed and he regarded the young man kindly.

"Surely," he said, "it is right to exhaust all the possibilities in a case of this sort."

"You mean that footprints can be faked?"

"I don't mean anything. I try to think of all

possibilities. Your uncle's body was found floating in the sea."

Duxford's face changed completely. The scorn died out of it and was replaced by a look of weariness.

"I suppose I'm on edge," he said gently. "It's the penalty of possessing nerves. I see your point. If I may I'll come back with you while you examine these hairs. Say what we like we're all under suspicion here and it's hard to endure. I shall not rest now till I know that it was not human blood which you found on Sahib's coat." He caught at Dr. Hailey's sleeve. "When I'm accused of anything, I always feel guilty. Why is that?"

"I believe it's quite a common failing."

"The inferiority complex, eh? Do you believe in Freud?"

The questions were thrown out, as if by sudden jerks. Duxford drew his hand across his brow.

"I seem to live," he confessed, "in expectation of disaster."

They reached the house. The doctor hesitated a moment on the threshold.

"Would it really ease your mind," he asked, "if I told you my findings at once?"

"Oh, yes, tremendously."

"Very well."

Dr. Hailey had a microspectroscope and some glass slides in his suit-case. He placed these on the dressing-table and proceeded to examine a few drops of the fluid in his bottle. He glanced at Dux-

ford, as he finished, and saw that the fellow was watching him like a dog that expects a beating. The cigarette he was smoking had broken between his fingers and the fine tobacco it contained had spilled on his coat.

"How I hate these damned instruments!"

"It's not human blood," Dr. Hailey stated.

"Thank God!"

Duxford rose, master of himself again. He held out his cigarette-case to his companion.

"The jury find the prisoner 'not guilty'!" he exclaimed. "That's exactly how I feel." He observed Dr. Hailey's refusal of his cigarette and closed the case with a snap. "Believe me or don't believe me, I feel 'not guilty' more because you've found that I'm not, than because I know that I'm not. I never can make myself know anything about myself. If you had found human blood I'd have sweated with fear—in spite of my knowledge that I didn't ride Uncle John down."

"Human nature tends to distrust human nature, you know."

Duxford lit a fresh cigarette.

"I asked you if you believed in Freud. You didn't tell me."

"No."

Dr. Hailey leaned back in his chair. He smiled and then shook his head. His hand moved to his waistcoat pocket and extracted his snuff-box.

"The blood is your horse's blood. A fly probably."

Duxford jumped up and stood with his back to the window.

"Do you know," he confessed, "ever since Uncle John's body was found I've had the most dreadful fear on me that I may have killed him myself?"

The second cigarette followed the first through the open window.

"Do you think that one can kill without knowing one is doing it?"

"Possibly."

"People sometimes give themselves up to the police, don't they, and confess to having committed murders they have not committed?"

"Very often."

"I feel just like that. I want to go to Colonel Wickham and say that I did it. The only thing that stops me is that I'm afraid I might be sent to a lunatic asylum."

Dr. Hailey let it be seen that he wished to be alone. As Duxford was leaving the room Wickham strode into it. He glanced at the young man without addressing him. When Duxford had gone he sat down by the bedside.

"The case," he declared, "is clear enough. The village postman has just been here and has stated that he saw John going down to bathe. He is certain that the time was exactly 7:25 because he was a little late in his round and looked at his watch as he came up the avenue. He saw John while his watch was still in his hand. One of the housemaids saw John about the same time. She

says the clock in the dining-room, where she was setting an early breakfast for Duxford, struck the half-hour just as her master went past the window, but I've ascertained that the clock in that room is five minutes fast."

Wickham opened his cigarette-case, glanced at the contents, and shut the case again with a snap.

"Take that hour, 7:25. Allow five minutes for John to reach the beach, take off his shoes and dressing-gown and walk down into the water. At 7:30 he had begun his bathe. At that moment Ned was approaching the boat-house and there was nobody in sight. The postman, on his way back from the house, saw Ned's boat approaching. Quarter of an hour later, at 7:45, Ned landed. As it happens an artist who is making a sketch of Pykewood village took up his place near the boat-house just before eight o'clock and remained there till the search party came from the village. We can say positively that John was not murdered after eight o'clock. There is Duxford's evidence that he was not murdered between 7:43, when Duxford rode along the dunes, and eight o'clock. Therefore, since he was seen, alive and well, at 7:25 and since his footsteps show that he reached the water, the murder took place between 7:30 and 7:45. During that quarter of an hour father and son were close beside one another and were not, so far as is known, under observation. Ned was in a boat one of the rowlocks of which is stained with clotted blood in

which there are fragments of white hair. Further, Ned, as you know, had good reason for wishing his father out of the way."

He paused and this time lit a cigarette. While he was speaking Dr. Hailey had procured a sheet of notepaper and made some brief notes on it.

"Let me see," he said, "our time-table is:

"7:25: Sir John seen by the housemaid and the postman on the way to bathe.

"7:30: Sir John reaches the water and begins to swim.

"7:30: The postman sees Ned's boat approaching the boat-house but does not stay to watch it."

"Don't forget," Wickham interrupted, "that soon after he left the house the postman had his back turned to the sea."

"Quite so. He did not stay to watch the boat.

"7:45: Ned lands at the boat-house and comes up here. From that moment all his movements are known.

"7:45: Duxford rides over the dunes. Waves to Ned and goes off to find hounds.

"7:50—shall we say?—The artist from Pyke-wood takes up his position until the arrival of the search party."

The detective nodded.

"Yes, that's the time-table. Exactly a quarter of an hour in which to commit the murder."

The doctor remained looking out of the window with vacant eyes. He told his companion

that it had occurred to him that Duxford might have committed the murder on the shore and carried the body out on his horse and mentioned his investigation of the horse's hair.

"Your time-table knocks the bottom out of that theory."

"Entirely." A smile, which was not wholly complimentary to Dr. Hailey, flickered on Wickham's lips. "There were no signs of a horse's hoofs on the sand," he remarked.

"I had thought of that. The horseman might have ridden into the sea, down the course of the Breamish brook, might he not?"

"But the police saw John's footmarks on the sand before the tide rose."

"Such things can be faked. . . ."

"My dear fellow, murders of this sort are never thought out in advance. They happen, as you suggested yourself, all of a sudden, on impulse. That's undeniably what occurred in the present case. Ned was coming home with his mind full of his father's injustice and harshness; chewing that cud sours the best digestion, and in this case digestion had been spoiled by pampering. His father must have seemed a brute, and it's likely enough that he persuaded himself that brutality did not stop at his own case. His father was a bully to his mother, to his sister. With the thoughts rankling and fuming in his mind, he turned round and saw his father swimming close beside him. One stroke of the oars. One blow,

followed in the frenzy of reaction by a second and a third, and it was all over. He pulled himself together, he washed the rowlock in the water. Thank God nobody had seen him. Within a minute he was rowing again towards the boat-house."

CHAPTER IX

PROFESSOR CARPENTER EXPLAINS

EVERY scientific worker knows the thrill of joy which accompanies the discovery of a theory that fits the facts. In a moment the chaos of isolated observations is transformed to a composite reality stamped with the authentic features of truth. Wickham, when he had completed his outline of the murder, inhaled a deep whiff of smoke.

"Ned killed his father," he declared in tones that were not wholly free from complacency. "It's horrible and tragic; but there's no getting away from it."

"Apparently not."

"What! Do you mean to say you feel the slightest doubt on the subject?"

The detective stared at his companion with an astonishment which was as lively as it was unaffected.

"Yes, I do."

"How? Where?"

Dr. Hailey shook his head.

"No, I can't give you reasons, other than the reason that I don't believe Ned capable of such an act!"

"What a defence!"

"You forget that I have spent my whole working life studying the minds of men and women. One develops, what shall I say, an intuition, an

instinct. The facts seem to show that this man killed his father; very well, my instinct rejects the facts. I say to myself, there's a link missing somewhere; if I'm wrong then I've failed in the task to which I have devoted more than a quarter of a century of effort. No reason here, you think. I'm not so sure. Have you asked yourself what sort of mind it is into which the murderous impulse came? It is, believe me, a very special type of mind. We all experience the wish that our enemies might cease to trouble us. We wish them consigned to outer darkness. Anger flares up. Hate perhaps plots in secret. But we don't kill. To be able to kill one must be abnormal or one must have been rendered abnormal temporarily. Those who kill are deficient in the social sense. Ned, as I read his character, is not deficient in these qualities. He told you that his mother always upheld his father's judgment. No murderer that I have ever heard of would have thought and spoken in that way."

Dr. Hailey's mask of indifference had fallen from him. His face, usually uneventful, was lighted by eagerness and enthusiasm and he emphasized his thoughts with gestures which gave them an excellent vigour. But Wickham was proof.

"In the eyes of the law," said he dryly, "all men are equal and all are, therefore, equally liable to be condemned on circumstantial evidence. If Ned didn't murder his father, who did? That's the acid test."

There was a gentle knock at the door. The detective rose and opened it, forgetful, apparently, of the fact that he was in Dr. Hailey's bedroom. He disclosed Professor Carpenter.

"May I come in?"

"Do."

The Professor glided into the room with his peculiar, soft-footed gait which had earned for him the nickname of "Blondon." He sat down on the end of the bed and wiped his brow with a large, rather yellow-looking, silk handkerchief.

"I intrude," he stated, "because I have gathered that such evidence as is available in the case points to Ned as the guilty person. Am I right?"

He glanced from Wickham to Dr. Hailey and then back to Wickham again. A rather nervous expression obscured for a moment his likeness to King Charles, but the likeness quickly reasserted itself when the detective declared bluntly that he was not prepared to discuss the case.

"You must, I think, discuss it. Indeed, I am sure you must. I have something to tell you."

His tones were confidential but the pedantic, old-maidish way in which he spoke, discounted this quality. Dr. Hailey had a premonition that he was about to raise a minatory finger and shake it at them. He experienced a sudden and scarcely accountable inclination to laugh. There was something strangely and yet powerfully mirth-compelling about this tall, gaunt man, half-King, half-Quixote, with his mincing ways, that ac-

corded so ill with his straggling, daddy-long-legs limbs.

Wickham frowned his resentment that he should be compelled to listen to any explanation, but finally submitted. Professor Carpenter began to nod his head.

"I am as you know a barrister," he began, "though I do not practice that profession. Philosophy claimed me; first the philosophy of law and then philosophy for its own sake. But I did practice at one time and had, I can say without any breach of modesty, as much work as I could do. Among others, I used to advise poor John Oldmay."

He broke off, emitting as he did so a peculiar little snort. He swung one of his long legs across the other, in a movement that discounted the impatience under which Wickham was so evidently labouring, a movement at once exasperating and boyish, of which a simple vanity seemed to be the spring. I hold the floor, the Professor seemed to say and so I have the right to take my time and tell my story as I choose.

"Well?" the detective ejaculated.

"I advised him on many matters, for he had many activities in addition to his tea business. Some years ago I helped him to draft his will . . . the will which has now been opened and read. As you know, he left his possessions to his wife with reversion to his son and daughter in equal shares. An ordinary will. A very ordinary and, as I think, very proper will. The kind of will any sensible

man, who had money to leave, might be expected to make."

Another snort, and a wave of the Professor's hands, brought this statement to an end. The man uncrossed his legs, smiled faintly and then leaned forward.

"Two days ago," he said in the tones of a conspirator outlining a plot, "I received a telephone call from John asking me to come at once to Pykewood. I was to stay at the village inn; I was not to hold any sort of communication with the Hall. He would come and visit me. 'It's tremendously important,' he declared, 'and that's all I can say about it.' Well, I decided to go, for John was a sober fellow not given to exaggeration. I packed up and reached the village the evening before last. I took a room at the 'King's Head'. About nine o'clock John appeared."

Professor Carpenter broke off, but retained his stiff, strained attitude. Observing him in this position it was easy to see why he had been described as having a "Continental look."

"John struck me at once as being in a very excited state. His eyes . . . you remember how dull they looked usually . . . they were glittering and the whites were bloodshot. And his hands—the muscles or sinews in his hands—kept twitching. So much so that I found myself watching the play of them; like the fingers of a musician at his fiddle. After he had shaken hands with me he went back to the door of the room, opened it, looked outside and then locked it. He gazed at me with

his glittering eyes for what seemed like a very long time: 'I can trust you, Aloysius,' he said over and over again. It began to dawn on me at last that he was asking a question and I assured him that I was trustworthy. At that he sank down—I might almost say he fell down—into an arm-chair. 'Aloysius,' he exclaimed, 'I have just suffered the heaviest blow of my life. Ned has failed me.' He kept pressing his hand to his temples as he spoke and I noticed that he continually moistened his lips with his tongue. 'He's in a fever,' I thought. 'He's not well!' I looked at the veins in his neck which, as my doctor has told me, are apt to pulsate when illness is at hand! Believe me, they were beating like a bat's wings. I prepared to humour him.

"But he brushed my consolations aside like so many dead flies. 'Ned's a young waster,' he said. 'A spendthrift, a winebibber'—you know how his mind harked back to the Scriptures—'what's more, he's been deceiving me. Contracting debts without my knowledge, over-spending his allowance, borrowing from his mother. . . . Oh, yes, he thought I would never find out, but I have discovered everything. And I am going to punish. . . .'"

The Professor shook his head as he pronounced the last word, making it clear that, as a philosopher, he rejected the order of ideas on which punishment is based. Wickham's interest had been captured and seemed to be quickening for he

moved impatiently in his chair until the story was continued.

"Punish," repeated Professor Carpenter, lowering his voice. "I guessed then what was coming. He was going to reduce Ned's share of his estate. He was going to execute a codicil to his will. Well, I was right and I was wrong. I knew John as a hard man—perhaps I should say as a stern man, but I confess that I hadn't thought him capable of disinheriting his only son. Ned wasn't to have a single penny. Not a red roost. He knew that he was entitled by English law to make such a will. The question was, was his will certain to be proved under the law of England? I mean, might it not be argued, after his death, that he had remained a domiciled Scotsman and had never acquired an English domicile. . . ."

The Professor contracted his brows, seeming to glance upwards to the ceiling.

"Under the law of Scotland a man cannot wholly disinherit any member of his family. And it's difficult to prove that a Scotsman, who has lived and worked in England, may not, nevertheless, have intended to return to Scotland to end his days. John had a place in Argyllshire. He had sent for me, first and foremost, to ask me whether I could assure him that he had acquired an English domicile. That anxiety was the measure of his anger against his son. I told him that he might execute a deed declaring his intention to remain in England, but that, even so, the case would probably be contested by his son.

"I had no idea that my opinion would exert so violent an effect on him, or perhaps I should not have expressed it. He glared at me. Then he lashed at the back of a chair with the stick he carried and broke the stick. 'If I have to engage a hundred lawyers to make this watertight,' he shouted, 'I'll do it. Ned shall not touch a penny. Do you hear?' I heard very well. 'This man,' I said to myself, 'is not normal. He's got some fever of his brain.' I promised him that on my return to London I would take the best advice available and would then come and see him again. 'There's no time to lose,' he told me, and gripped my coat as he spoke. 'Do you understand, there's no time to lose!'"

The Professor glanced from Wickham to Dr. Hailey.

"I didn't understand. I don't understand now. But I told him I realized his difficulty. He went away, leaving me exhausted. It was only when he had gone that I understood what a tremendous strain the interview had imposed on me. The poor fellow was so highly excited that he seemed to possess the power of giving nervous shocks to other people; I felt as if I had been in a pond with an electric eel. I couldn't eat my dinner and I was sitting wondering what I ought to do when the servant brought me up a note from John. Here it is."

Professor Carpenter plunged his hand into his pocket and brought out a folded sheet of paper.

He handed it to Wickham who read it and passed it to the doctor. It ran:

My dear Aloysius, on second thoughts come and see me to-morrow on the bathing beach below this house at 7.30. You won't be observed because the dunes hide the beach from the windows and nobody else bathes at that hour. You'll have plenty of time to get back to breakfast and catch your train.

Yours,
JOHN.

"Did you go?"

Wickham's tones revealed the excitement under which he was now labouring.

"I did indeed. Unhappily I overslept and was a little late. I didn't come in sight of the bathing beach until 7.35. I looked at my watch so I'm quite sure of the time."

"Yes, yes."

Professor Carpenter shook his head.

"No. I saw nobody. There was nobody on the beach or in the sea."

CHAPTER X

THE MAN IN THE BOAT

SILENCE filled the bedroom. It was broken by Wickham.

"But, my dear sir, what you say is ridiculous. We know as a fact that John Oldmay was murdered between 7.30 and 7.45, in the sea. Did you remain on the beach?"

"Near it. I watched the bathing-place till close upon eight o'clock. Till an artist came and set up his easel quite near me. Then I returned to the inn."

"And you saw nobody?"

"Nobody . . . except Ned and his cousin Duxford."

"Oh!"

The detective jumped up and stood over his man in an attitude which was almost threatening.

"You saw Ned," he cried, "at 7.35?"

"Oh, no. Long before that. Don't forget, my dear Wickham, that as soon as you leave the Pykewood inn you command a view of the sea. I saw Ned's boat the minute I stepped out into the village street, and I didn't lose sight of it after that."

The Professor crossed his legs again. He spread out his hands.

"I could see the boat, but not the bathing-beach. It was about 7.25. I kept my eye on the boat as I

walked across the dunes and saw that it was making for the Pykewood Hall boat-house. Then I guessed it was Ned. That was exceedingly inconvenient to me as you can understand. I thought of going back to the inn right away and then I saw that, if I remained among the dunes, I could easily keep out of sight till Ned had landed and gone up to the house. But it was necessary, in the first instance, to assure myself that John was actually having his bathe and to let him know that I had kept the appointment. I intended to call to him, attract his attention, and then lie down on the sand behind one of the hillocks. However, as I told you, there was no sign of him on the bathing-beach. 'He's late,' I thought, and lay down to wait and watch. From where I was stationed I could see both the boat and the bathing-beach. Ned was rowing steadily and consequently had his back to me the whole time. He rowed right into the shed without a pause of any sort."

Again the room was plunged in silence.

"You're aware," Wickham asked, "that at that moment his father's body was floating in the sea within a few hundred yards of the place where you were lying?"

"Yes, it must have been, because I stayed till the artist came, and I believe he stayed till the search-party came."

"So that, unless you're mistaken about Ned's behaviour, John was murdered between 7.30 and 7.35?"

"It seems like that."

"How can he have been murdered in that time? Either he was killed in the water or his body was carried into the water. In neither case was there sufficient time for the murderer to reach the shore again and escape before you appeared on the scene."

Professor Carpenter looked a trifle bewildered. He glanced at Dr. Hailey.

"What do you say, doctor?"

"I agree with Wickham. John Oldmay was seen going down to bathe. It was then 7.25. It must have been fully 7.30 before he entered the water and later still before he reached the place where his body was found. You would have seen his murderer if the murder was committed by someone accompanying him or following him to the water because the murderer had no time to get away. The same is true if the murder was committed on land."

"Besides," Wickham interrupted, "there are the footprints. The police, before the tide rose and obliterated everything, found only one set of footprints, going down from the place where John left his shoes and towel and dressing-gown. The sand below high water is as soft as putty. It would reveal the footprints of a mouse."

"Strange, certainly," said Carpenter.

"Surely you see the explanation. The murder was committed by someone in a boat. Where was Ned's boat at 7.35?"

Professor Carpenter thought a moment.

"It must have been pretty near the place where the body was found," he admitted. "Yes, very near. But I'm sure that Ned didn't stop rowing."

"You were watching the beach as well as the boat, remember."

"Yes, I was. But I could see them both without moving my head."

"But not without moving your eyes. It takes only an instant to strike a blow."

The Professor's face grew more and more troubled.

"I should have seen John's head, swimming, before the boat reached him," he urged tentatively.

"Not necessarily, if he happened to be swimming close to the boat. The sea wasn't rough, but there were waves—big enough waves to make identification of a small object difficult. Did you see John's dressing-gown lying on the beach?"

"I didn't, no."

"A red dressing-gown is a more conspicuous object against yellow sand than a human head against waves. It's very easy to overlook any object at a distance."

Carpenter rose. He towered above Wickham. There was fear in his eyes.

"I don't believe Ned killed his father," he declared in the awe-struck tones of a man who feels himself being thrust towards a monstrous conclusion.

"You mean that you don't wish to believe it?"

The detective's tones were bullying.

There was no answer. Dr. Hailey asked leave to put a few questions.

CHAPTER XI

CURRENTS

"I WANT in the first place," Dr. Hailey said, "to get quite clear about John Oldmay's mental state. You've told us that he seemed to be almost delirious when he visited you at Pykewood inn. But his letter, asking you to meet him on the bathing-beach, suggests that, when he left you, he recovered to some extent."

"It does indeed. That's how I read it," Carpenter exclaimed.

"And then there's the second letter—the one he sent to London."

"Yes. In which he doesn't even mention my visit to Pykewood. When I received that second letter I came to the conclusion that the Pykewood incident must have been completely blotted from his mind."

The doctor nodded.

"May we not put it another way? When he came to see you at the inn, John Oldmay was thinking only about Ned's debts and about the difficulty he anticipated in cutting his son out of his will. Whereas, when he wrote the letter you received in London, he was thinking only about himself—about the foreboding he had of approaching death."

Carpenter nodded.

"Exactly."

"You may or may not know that it is characteristic of certain states of mental exaltation to pass very rapidly from one idea to another without retaining any effective memory of the transition. People suffering from meningitis and other forms of inflammation of the brain frequently exhibit that symptom. The sensory perception is often, at the same time, enormously quickened. I may be wrong, but I think we are entitled, on the evidence, to ask ourselves whether or not John Oldmay was so afflicted."

"But, good gracious, what does it matter if he was?" Wickham interrupted. "You don't suggest that he committed suicide, do you?"

"I do not."

"Murder is murder, whether the victim is ill or well."

Dr. Hailey put his eyeglass in his eye.

"The other question I wish to ask," he said, addressing Carpenter, "concerns Dyke Duxford. You said you saw him?"

"Yes. Ned landed at 7.45. Just as he left the boat-house, Duxford appeared on horseback on the dunes, dressed in hunting clothes. He waved his cap to his cousin and then rode away along the shore. I watched him till he was out of sight."

Carpenter spoke in low tones. His voice had lost its cheerfulness and with that quality its timbre. He seemed to be ill-at-ease and kept glancing at the detective. Wickham was watching him narrowly.

"I want you to understand, Carpenter," Wick-

ham said, "that your evidence is vital. You'll be questioned and cross-questioned. It will be the object of the Prosecution to break down your statement that Ned never stopped rowing; the Defence will, of course, try to make you hold to it."

"You mean if Ned is charged with murder?"

"Yes."

"I shall hold to it. I'm as sure as I can be that Ned did not miss a single stroke."

"It's your word against that of half a dozen others. The circumstances are such that nobody except Ned can have committed the murder."

Dr. Hailey spent the afternoon on the shore. He found that it took him five minutes to walk from the Hall to the beach, going at a reasonably quick pace. John Oldmay, therefore, could not have entered the water until within three or four minutes of the arrival of Carpenter. He had had only just enough time to swim out to a point intersecting the line of approach of Ned's boat. So far Wickham was certainly on solid ground. The fine, shifting sand above high-water made it impossible to trace any footsteps in this region. Footsteps, as he proved, on this soft sand, left only little hollows of which there were already hundreds. He walked across to the boat-house and launched the second boat, that one the rowlocks of which were of the fixed type. He rowed to the place where the body had been found and then back to the shed. Seven minutes were required for the return journey. Since Ned had landed at 7.45, he must have been near his father's body

at 7.38, three minutes after Carpenter's arrival. It would certainly be urged by the Prosecution that, at this moment, Carpenter's attention was directed exclusively to the bathing-beach on which, every moment, he expected to see John Oldmay appear. The doctor realized that even an indifferently persuasive advocate would have no difficulty in convincing a jury that, before Carpenter began, in earnest, to watch the boat, the murder had been committed.

What could be set against that wholly reasonable contention? Only the set of the currents in the bay. Would these currents allow a body to remain in the same place for more than an hour or bring it back again? He tied up the boat and walked to the place where Carpenter had hidden. He sat down and took a pinch of snuff. The afternoon was warm and there was haze on the sea, near the horizon. The sea was in the mood in which it promises fulfilment of the dreams its gentleness arouses, if only one will sail far enough into its smoky golden distances.

He remembered that he had known the same feelings in his teens on this same Northumbrian coast. He had been in love then and the *wanderlust* of love was added to the *wanderlust* of the sea. He wished himself now across the sea in France, from which he had so lately returned.

He saw a girl walking on the dunes near where John Oldmay had come down to take his last bathe and recognized Caroline Oldmay. She disappeared behind one of the sandhills and then

reappeared again. Did she know what was in store for her brother? With an effort he brought his mind back to the problem he had come to consider, closing the ways of escape to the distances of the sea. Most of the bays on the Northumbrian coast were swept by currents, which, as a rule, varied in force and direction according to the state of the tide. It might be possible to argue that John Oldmay's body could not have remained at the place where he was murdered and that, consequently, the spot where it was found and taken from the water had no special significance. But Wickham would certainly reply that John Oldham had had time to swim out to Ned and that this was the material point. He resolved to make a full and detailed study of the set of the currents and wrote out an order for the Admiralty chart of this part of the coast. But he did not feel very hopeful. Currents are notoriously under the influence of so many variable circumstances that it is always possible to explain them away.

A new idea crossed his mind. The sound of oars falls as a rule so agreeably on the ears that interruption of it is immediately resented. Since Carpenter had not mentioned the sound, the presumption was that it had not been interrupted. Again, if Ned had stopped rowing, Carpenter would have glanced in his direction to see why he had stopped. The distance was not so great that he could have failed, in that event, to satisfy his curiosity. If it was murder, he must have seen the murder. Several blows had been struck and John

Oldmay had tried to ward off one at least of them. The assault must have lasted a minute or more. . . .

He turned suddenly and saw Caroline standing, gazing at him. She was bare-headed; the misty, golden light seemed to be entangled in her red hair.

"I've been looking for you," she said, in tense accents.

CHAPTER XII

A HYSTERICAL GIRL

HE OBSERVED that she was trembling. There was a flush, faint and yet unmistakable, on the whites of her eyes, which had the effect of changing the expression of the eyes. She looked as if she hadn't slept for many nights.

She told him that her nerves were giving way.

"It's natural that you should be distressed," he said gently. "The reaction which follows a shock is worse, often, than the shock itself."

Caroline shook her head.

"That's not my trouble. I know what you mean and I suppose I'm suffering a little from reaction. But that's not why I'm afraid." She put out her hand and caught Dr. Hailey's sleeve. "Why I'm afraid," she whispered, "is because—" she broke off—"No, I can't tell you."

He invited her to walk with him on the dunes, judging that it would ease her mind if she was unembarrassed by the necessity of looking him in the face. She clutched again at his arm, as if she feared she might stumble, but after a moment relinquished it.

"I feel," she told him, "as if I was dreaming one of those dreams in which there's a precipice waiting. You know how the thought of the precipice is there from the beginning. You realize where you are; you look at things, at people; you

feel interest even in your surroundings. But it's the kind of interest people take in the cabins of a ship in which they're just going to sail out into a hurricane. It won't last; the howling of the wind is in their ears."

She stood still, gazing out to sea.

"I seem to hear oars in the distance," she said. "Can you hear them?"

"No, I can't."

"Oh, yes, surely. Listen. Thrum-thrupp, thrum-thrupp, thrum-thrupp. . . ."

Her hands went up, shielding her eyes.

"The boat must be out there in the mist."

"I hear nothing."

She turned suddenly and faced him.

"Father heard the waves on the beach when nobody else could hear them," she said in awe-struck tones.

"My hearing may not be as acute as yours."

She shook her head sadly and then a sigh broke from her lips.

"If I could get these cobwebs out of my brain. Everything is so unreal; I seem to be miles away from myself. I know that I'm talking to you, but you might be a character in a book."

"Let me feel your pulse."

He put out his hand and took her wrist. Her pulse was slow, of rather poor volume.

"It's just possible that you're going to be ill," he said in doubtful tones. "A chill."

"Oh, no. I know when I've had a chill." She moved her arms swiftly in a gesture which seemed

to ward off imminent danger. "I'm not afraid of illness. That's not it. There's something coming—something's going to happen. . . ."

Her voice failed, though her lips continued to move. He thought that she was trying to control herself, but if so the effort was unsuccessful because she began again to talk about her feelings. A big brown butterfly fluttered up from the sea-grass at their feet, trembling and reeling in the sunlight which had intoxicated it. She stiffened to watch its antics, posing for an instant like a swimmer about to dive and revealing the grace of her figure. But interest, recaptured for a moment, escaped again like the butterfly, lost already among the particulate gold which filled the air.

"Who killed my father?" she asked suddenly.

"I don't know."

"Not Ned!" She nodded her head threateningly.

"No."

"And yet nobody else can have killed him?"

"That's how it looks at present."

She turned to face him.

"I knew the moment I saw Colonel Wickham," she declared, "that he thought Ned had killed father. There was something in the way he spoke to me, in the way he moved his hands and his head. People tell more by their gestures, very often, than they tell by their lips. You, Doctor, for example. Ever since I mentioned that I could hear that rowing your mind has been busy with thoughts about boats and oars. . . . You've kept

moving your right hand in little circles as if you were rowing yourself."

She glanced at his hand as she spoke; it relaxed instantly.

"You have quick eyes, Miss Oldmay."

"To-day, yes." The fear returned to her face. "And quick ears. I've noticed a hundred trifles to-day that I've never noticed before—about people and things. Queer, tell-tale trifles, glances, tones, movements. It's like being able suddenly to understand a language one has heard for years without understanding."

She drew her breath sharply.

"Do you think father had the same experience on the last day of his life?"

"Perhaps."

They returned to the house. Dr. Hailey brought a stop-watch from his bedroom and asked her to allow him to test her sense of hearing. Having determined at what distance the ticking was inaudible to himself, he placed her at a still greater distance from the watch and then proceeded to restart it, requiring her to tell him when the interruptions occurred. Her responses proved beyond doubt that her range of hearing was no greater than his own. Her father's death had brought about an hysterical imitation of his symptoms.

"There's nothing wrong," he declared in confident tones.

She looked at him for a moment with troubled,

bewildered eyes. Then fear once more dominated her expression.

"Father didn't think he was going to die, did he?"

He shook his head, holding the untruth justified as a measure of therapy. Caroline's distress seemed to be increasing. She reminded him of Ophelia, in the mad scene. He rang the bell and asked Nagge if Dr. Jordan had finished his examination of the body.

"He's coming downstairs now, sir."

"Ask him to come here."

Dr. Jordan confirmed the finding that Caroline's hearing was normal. He was still sore from his encounter with Wickham, and asked no questions about the progress of the investigations when he and Dr. Hailey were left alone.

"Caroline's a hysterical girl," he declared in the tones of a man who has little time to spare for trifles. "It doesn't do to give her any encouragement. Let her hear of any symptom and she'll have it in an hour."

"Would you say she was ill?"

"No. Would you?"

"Not exactly. But there's something queer about her. Her eyes, for example."

Dr. Jordan shrugged his shoulders.

"A bit bloodshot, yes."

He threw away the cigarette he was smoking preparatory to going. It was obvious that he considered he had been summoned on a frivolous

pretext. The general practitioner is never inclined to be tolerant of the whims of the specialist.

He walked briskly out of the room leaving a faint smell of carbolic acid behind him. Dr. Hailey heard the buzz of the self-starter on his car, a prolonged, unthrifty note. The car drove away. He watched it leave the avenue and noticed how nearly its closed dickey resembled the hinder parts of a crab. It seemed unlikely that Jordan would ever possess a vehicle of better quality. Nagge came into the room and he asked him if the doctor had a good practice.

"I think he has, sir. But there's not much money now in the countryside, since all the farms have been turned down to grass. Farmers that were employing ten hands when Sir John came to Pyke-wood are employing two now. Dr. Jordan's very well liked though. He has the name of being kind to the poor."

The butler retrieved an empty siphon as if arming himself with an excuse for his intrusion. He seemed on the point of speech, but professional instincts held him dumb and he went away with his curiosity unslaked. Dr. Hailey lay down till dinner. Only Wickham and Carpenter appeared at the meal and only Carpenter seemed anxious to talk. He had, he said, been occupying himself by concentrating his mind on his experiences while awaiting Sir John on the dunes.

"I am more convinced than ever," he assured Wickham, "that Ned did not stop rowing for an instant. I could hear his strokes even when I was

not looking at him and I should have noticed any break in the rhythm."

Wickham was sipping white Burgundy. The expression on his face recalled that of a physician enduring a medical discussion between laymen.

"So that nobody murdered John," he observed in his driest tones.

The servants were out of the room. Carpenter thrust out his hands, nearly upsetting his wine-glass.

"Not Ned, sir. Not Ned."

"Do please look the facts in the face."

"That's what I'm doing. The facts of my own experience necessarily transcend in importance any other facts. And the sound of those oars, their rhythm, is, for me, the greatest fact of all. The oars did not stop. The rhythm was not broken. Therefore, Ned did not kill his father."

"Very well." Wickham fingered his glass. "Then John was killed by somebody who possessed a speed of locomotion transcending that of any other living man. On your own showing there was nobody visible on the bathing beach at 7.35, ten minutes after John left the house. Nobody came ashore after that hour."

"I agree."

"You do not agree. You are saying that somebody other than Ned committed the murder, therefore somebody must have come ashore after that hour."

"Yes."

"Which is impossible."

"It looks impossible, I admit."

"It is impossible and, therefore, your belief that the rhythm of the oars was not broken must be mistaken, unless indeed Ned continued to row with one oar while he was striking at his father. I take it that you're not prepared to say that you heard both oars all the time."

The sarcasm was not tempered by any wish to spare Carpenter's feelings. But it was wasted on that boyish spirit.

"Of course not. But that idea's absurd. Ned couldn't know that I was listening to him and anyhow the thought of a broken rhythm isn't likely to have entered his mind." A new gesture put the wine-glasses once more in jeopardy. "You say no other explanation than your explanation is possible. You're wrong. I can prove to you that you're wrong."

Nagge re-entered the room and Carpenter reserved his eloquence. But at the first opportunity it flowed again.

"Hasn't it occurred to you," he demanded, "that during at least ten minutes I was in sole possession of the bathing beach and that, for all you know, I may have been on the beach when John reached it? Can you say, for certain, that it was not I who killed John?"

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN THE WIND IS IN THE EAST

WICKHAM permitted himself to smile.

"I can say for certain," he remarked in his quietest tones, "that you left the inn at Pykewood precisely at 7.30. Three witnesses are prepared to testify to that. Therefore you did not reach your post on the dunes till 7.35 at the earliest. In the ten minutes remaining, before the arrival of the artist, you could not have walked to the Breamish brook, waded down the brook to the sea, committed the murder and returned, by the brook, to your place on the dunes."

"Why should I have followed that roundabout route?"

"Because, my dear sir, had you taken any other route you would have left your footprints on the wet sand—as John did—and the police would have seen them. There were no footprints on the sand, other than John's, between the boat-house and the brook. You see that, having duly suspected you, I have dismissed you from the case."

Carpenter drank before he replied.

"I fall back on the rhythm of the oars," he declared. "Until you have disposed of that piece of evidence, the case against Ned falls."

"In your opinion?"

"In my opinion."

Wickham laughed, reddening as he laughed. His thick-set body, made to give and take blows, contrasted rudely with Carpenter's loose limbs.

"In matters of this kind we do well to stick to the facts," he said. "What are they? The place where you waited is on a promontory, with the bay which contains the bathing-beach on one side and the bay on which Pykewood village is built on the other. The wind on the morning of the murder was from the east. A fresh wind. Consequently sounds coming from the west, from the open sea, outside of the bays, were being carried away from you. Sounds within the bays on the contrary, that is to say sounds arising to the east of where you were lying, were coming to you. Do you agree?"

"Go on."

"John Oldmay's body was floating at a point to the west of your position; there was, however, a rowing-boat, a fisherman's boat, to the east of you, near the mouth of Pykewood harbour. What you heard were the fisherman's oars, not Ned's oars."

"No."

"Pardon me, it must be so. You cannot have heard Ned's oars until he was close inshore, until, that is, the murder had been committed. Again, you cannot have failed to hear the fisherman's oars. Dr. Hailey will tell you that the localization of sound is always an exceedingly difficult matter. The fishing-boat was behind you, out of sight, whereas Ned was in full view."

The Professor's face lost its confidence and his hands their direction. They moved aimlessly. He pushed his full glass away from him, then drew it back and then he arranged the empty glasses round the full one.

"What does the artist say?" he asked at last. "He must have heard the oars, too."

"He confirms what I've told you. He's convinced that he heard the fisherman, not Ned."

"But he was nearer the fisherman than I was."

"Not very much. The real difference is that he saw the fisherman, whereas you didn't."

Coffee was served in the smoking-room by servants who went in fear. Dr. Hailey watched the triumphant attitude of the Scotland Yard chief and the despondency into which Carpenter had fallen and pitched about in his own mind for some rag of criticism to oppose to Wickham's theory. Wickham meant to hang Ned Oldmay, and had achieved the means of doing so. His case was complete, motive, manner, everything. Ned or nobody, and therefore Ned. If only it could be shown that any other human being had approached within range of the bather. He turned to Carpenter:

"Did John Oldmay offer any excuse for sending you to the village inn instead of putting you up here?" he asked.

"He said he didn't wish his wife to know what he was doing."

"But he had told her, and his son and daughter, what he was going to do. An angry man is

seldom shy about letting people see that he is fulfilling his threats."

"That's what he said. I confess I felt a bit surprised myself. John always favoured what he used to call the open diplomacy. What do you say, Wickham?"

"What do I say? Isn't it plain enough? We have his letters telling us that he expected to be murdered. Why? To prevent him changing his will. He took the precaution, apparently, of changing his will in such a way as to minimize that danger. Even so, he was forestalled."

There was a knock at the door. The butler announced that Lady Oldmay wished to speak to Dr. Hailey.

CHAPTER XIV

A CLOSED ROOM

LADY OLD MAY received Dr. Hailey in a small room communicating with the drawing-room. A room comfortably empty, interesting, costly. She was standing by the fireplace but sat down as soon as she had greeted him. He divined a tension in her body which less observant eyes would have missed. She asked his forgiveness for troubling him and then looked him squarely in the face.

"I want you to tell me, doctor," she said, "if it is true that Colonel Wickham suspects my son of having killed his father?"

Not a tremor of the cold, clear, well-bred voice. She might have been asking him if he had enjoyed his stroll on the dunes. He considered a moment, measuring her courage, and then answered:

"It is true."

The blow produced no effect.

"On what grounds?"

"That your son is the only person who can have committed the crime."

"Please tell me the details."

She moved her hand in a gesture which might have been construed as impatience. Her eyes were fixed on the wall behind him. He told her all that he knew.

"It's a question of time, you see," he concluded. "There's no doubt that Sir John did leave this

house at 7.25. Ten minutes later, at 7.35, Professor Carpenter had taken up his position overlooking the bathing beach. Sir John, we know, reached the sea. That disposes of at least seven, probably eight of the ten minutes. Nobody could have killed him in the water and got away in three minutes nor could anybody in that time have killed him on the beach, carried his body into the water and escaped."

"You mean that Professor Carpenter would have seen the murderer?"

"He must have seen him."

"Whereas Ned was afloat?"

"Yes. At or about the spot where the murder was committed."

Lady Oldmay stiffened.

"But in that case Professor Carpenter must have seen Ned actually do it."

"He didn't. But he was watching the beach as well as the boat. It takes only an instant to strike a blow."

The woman considered a moment.

"It's more serious than I thought," she confessed. "They've got a strong case. Terribly strong." She leaned forward. "What do you say, Dr. Hailey?"

"I believe that there's a flaw in the case."

He saw her eyes gleam, but that was only for an instant.

"Where?"

"I don't know."

"I can't see any flaw—if Professor Carpenter

did not watch the boat the whole time. John's body was found floating in deep water. He had been murdered."

"Yes."

"And he did go out at 7.25. I heard him go myself. His room is next to mine. I hadn't slept much and I was wide awake. There's a clock on the table at my bedside. It was exactly 7.23 when he went downstairs."

She leaned back again as she spoke; she seemed, he thought, to have exhausted her strength. But her features remained immobile.

"I wish to say," she stated, speaking with great deliberation, "that I do not believe that Ned murdered his father. Not for a moment. Never. I'm going to find the flaw in Colonel Wickham's case."

He realized that she was asking him to help her. He sat fingering his eyeglass doubtful whether or not to offer his help.

"Why did your husband send Carpenter to the village inn, instead of inviting him to stay here?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Did he tell you he had sent for Carpenter?"

"No."

"Did he suggest that he was afraid of your son?"

There was a moment of silence.

"I suppose that, in a way, he did suggest that."

Lady Oldmay showed no embarrassment but neither did she display any desire to offer further enlightenment.

"I want you to tell me more about John's death," she declared, changing the subject suddenly. "Is it not possible that he was waylaid and killed in the sand dunes?"

"No." Dr. Hailey considered a moment. "I think you must look on the sea, near the bathing beach, as a closed room," he said. "So far as this case is concerned it's exactly like a closed room. There is the door, the usual means of entry, down the beach. And there are the windows—the open sea. Possibly the Breamish brook might be regarded as the chimney, because a person who entered the sea by walking down the brook would leave no footprints. Very well. Your husband was seen going towards the 'door' and we know that he passed through it. After that it was shut and locked because the police found only one set of footprints on the wet sand below high-water mark—those of your husband going down into the sea. We are consequently entitled to say that nobody else entered the 'room' by the door; and as your husband's footprints enter but do not return we should expect to find his body within.

"Now come to the 'chimney'. Did anybody enter the sea by wading down the Breamish brook so as to avoid leaving traces? That question can be answered at once. There was insufficient time for anybody to enter the 'room' by the 'chimney', reach your husband, kill him and return again. The time available was not more than three—at the utmost three and a half—minutes, whereas the journey down the brook into the sea and back

again could not be accomplished in less than ten minutes at the very least. Remember that Sir John was seen leaving this house at 7.25, and that Professor Carpenter had the bathing beach in full view at 7.35. I may add that what applies to the brook applies also to the boat-house. It was suggested that the murderer might have entered the sea through the boat-house but I can assure you that this is wholly impossible.

"So we have to turn our attention to the 'windows'—the open sea. When we do that we find your son in a boat sailing right into the 'room' at the very moment when the murder was committed."

He paused.

"Might not somebody have been hidden in the 'room'?" Lady Oldmay asked.

"I don't think so. If the murderer had awaited his victim in the sea—by swimming about for example—he would still have lacked sufficient time to escape. At least five minutes were requisite to reach the brook and he had, at most, three and a half minutes to spare. Carpenter would have seen him walking up the shore."

"Unless he had stayed in the water—a good swimmer could get away from the bay easily enough."

"Not without being seen."

"My dear doctor, Professor Carpenter did not see John, yet if Colonel Wickham's theory is right, John was swimming when Professor Carpenter

came within sight of the beach. The murder is supposed to have taken place at 7.40, isn't it?"

"Yes. But don't forget that your son would have seen the murderer. He would certainly have reported the fact that he had observed somebody swimming out of the bay whereas he has stated positively that he saw nobody. It is, I think, quite inconceivable that he could have failed to see a swimmer who must have passed close beside him and remained in view."

Lady Oldmay assented.

"Are you certain," she asked in tones which had not lost their determination, "that Professor Carpenter can be relied on? He's a queer man in many ways and very unpunctual. How do you know that he really did reach his position at 7.35?"

"He was timed leaving the village inn. I'm afraid there's no chance of disputing that timing."

A flush spread over the woman's cheeks; her eyes brightened.

"And in face of that evidence, doctor, you still believe Ned innocent?"

Again, this time more humbly than before, she was asking him for help. He divined, under her attitude of practical common sense, a dread which moved him. She was pleading for all that she possessed. How proud she was!

"I believe him innocent, yes," he said. "I won't trouble you with the reasons which are remote from sentiment. But if I'm to help you, you must

be frank with me. It's imperative that I should know what happened between your son and his father. The details."

She pressed her lips together and so remained for a few minutes. Then she glanced at the door of the room.

"Very well, I'll tell you."

She rose and walked to the door, opened it and shut it again.

"Two days before his death," she said, "John asked me if it was true that I had had a pendant containing a large emerald, which he had given me, copied in order to sell the original. I told him it was true. 'You had it copied to deceive me?' 'Yes.' 'Why?' 'Because I needed the money.'"

"When I said that I knew that he had already guessed all my secret. For a Scotsman he had an unusually expressive face. His face expressed something more difficult to bear than anger or indignation. He was distressed, cut to the quick. I was aware, instantly, how his mind was working and so was not surprised when he said: 'Ned comes before me, eh?' It's strange how violently a mother reacts against what she feels to be an injustice to her son. I had never been able to endure my husband's attitude to Ned because I realized that he did not understand the boy, indeed could not understand him. He was always wrong where Ned was concerned and therefore always unfair. I felt myself growing violently angry. 'I should not have been compelled to sell my jewellery,' I cried, 'if you had made a friend of your

boy and won his confidence.' My husband looked at me very hard for a few moments and then asked if I had sold much of my jewellery. When I told him that I had sold most of it, he seemed to freeze. He had a wonderful memory for values and I saw him calculating the sum I had probably received. I knew he would guess the sum and so, before his calculation was finished, I told him: 'Ned's debts are £20,000.' I can see his face now as he listened; it looked older all of a sudden so that I was sorry for him. Money meant so much to him, and what he called probity. 'To whom did he owe this money?' he asked. 'I don't know.' 'I must know.' He rang the bell and sent for Ned. I have never felt so proud of my son as I did when he came into the room to face his father. Something carried me back at that moment so that I saw him as a baby with his tiny hands stretched out to his father, and then as a little child seated on his father's knee, then as a school-boy. . . . I felt if only I could put Time back and bring them together again. And, instead, there was Ned with his manhood in his face, covering his childhood. He was pale but he looked John straight in the eyes. His lips were pressed tightly together."

Lady Oldmay broke off suddenly. She averted her head.

"Ned told his father," she declared, "that he was in the hands of a money-lender.

" 'You owed him £20,000?' John asked in those cold deadly tones of his. 'Yes.' 'How did you spend

the money?' 'I spent it.' I knew exactly what was coming and so did Ned. John was going to say that Ned had a good home and enough for all reasonable needs. I couldn't endure to listen to him and so I cried: 'It all comes of your marrying me, John. My son was bound to look on life differently from you. Blame me, blame yourself. . . .' He stood gazing at me, with the blood rising in his cheeks. I realized too late how terribly I had wounded him, for he was ridiculously sensitive. 'What can a tradesman know about a gentleman's expenses?' he sneered, imitating my voice. 'You know I didn't mean that!' When I am upset tears always come into my eyes. I put out my hand and touched Ned's arm and he came a step nearer to me. He seemed to shield me. John lost his self-control . . ."

She broke off again. "You can imagine the rest."

She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. Dr. Hailey sat looking down at the carpet. The spectacle of the boy shielding his mother from his father's anger moved him but he tried, nevertheless, to look at it from John Oldmay's point of view. No father, in these circumstances, could have maintained a philosophical attitude. The man must have felt that his wife and son were leagued against him and that the weapons they were employing were anything but fair weapons. After all, Ned had squandered a fortune. That was bad enough surely without the added insult that he

had acted in this way because he was better bred than his father.

"Did your husband find out how the money had been spent?"

"Not then."

"You mean that your son refused to tell him?"

"Yes."

The doctor leaned towards Lady Oldmay.

"Do you know how he spent the money?"

She bowed her head.

"Yes, I do know. But I can't tell you."

CHAPTER XV

FATHER AND SON

DR. HAILEY did not press the point about the manner of Ned's extravagance. But he questioned Lady Oldmay closely about her husband's attitude to his son, after the fact of the debts had been made known to him. She displayed some reluctance in answering these questions.

"I didn't understand John at the time," she said, "and I don't understand him now. I felt that some process was going on in his mind to which I had no clue. I've told you already that I got the impression that he was afraid of Ned."

"Of what Ned might do to him?"

"Yes. He seemed to think that he was the object of violent hatred."

Dr. Hailey considered a moment.

"He had learned that his son was deeply in debt and that you had sold your jewels, including presents from himself to which a sentimental value might be supposed to attach, in order to prevent his finding out about these debts. You had defended your son and your son had seemed to defend you. Seriously, can you wonder that he felt himself isolated?"

"Perhaps not." Lady Oldmay's voice betrayed impatience. "But he seemed to expect Ned to . . . to do something violent. All the time he was shout-

ing that he was done with him and meant to leave him nothing, I had a feeling that, behind his fury, there was fear. I can't put it more exactly than that. So far as I know, Ned never spoke a threatening or even a rude word to his father in his life. I felt indignant that my husband should display such an attitude towards my son."

"Naturally."

"One of the things John said was: 'Who steals my honour takes my life.' He had been accusing Ned of pledging his credit with money-lenders and so dragging his name in the financial gutter."

"Even so, the fact that his son had pledged his credit would scarcely make him fear for his life. Did anything happen, recently, which might be twisted into a real threat to his life, anything, I mean, connected with your son?"

Lady Oldmay started.

"Something did happen," she declared, "but it's too ridiculous. One day last week when John and Ned were out deep-sea fishing the bung came out of the boat. John said that Ned must have pulled it out and accused Ned—in fun, of course—of having tried to drown him. The joke lasted several days."

"The incident might appear in a different light after Ned's debts were discovered?"

Dr. Hailey spoke tentatively. He watched the effect of his suggestion.

"It might. But I really can't think that John ever seriously suspected Ned."

"You've just told me he was afraid of him."

"I know. But it's too absurd. If John did come to think that Ned tried to swamp the boat his mind must have been unhinged."

"Are you quite sure that his mind was not unhinged?"

She shook her head.

"It didn't occur to me."

"He was depressed, wasn't he, on the night before he was killed?"

"He seemed very ill."

It was evident that John Oldmay had told the truth when he said in his letter to Carpenter that he had told his wife nothing about his forebodings. Dr. Hailey informed her about that letter and the letter which Wickham had received.

"You see, he was in hourly expectation of an attack on his life."

"It's horrible." She clutched at the bodice of her dress. Her lips moved but no words came. He saw her eyes fill with tears.

"I think we must recognize that the fear you observed developed in a short time into panic. It may very well be that the accident in the boat, which looked at first like a joke began to prey on his mind, when he heard about the debts. He would see, of course, that had he been drowned, your son's difficulties would have been at an end. That thought may have been followed by the question: 'Did Ned mean to drown me?' Suppose for a moment that he was not feeling very well and

that, consequently, his mind was overcast. Your defence of your son against him and Ned's attitude in shielding you, may have occasioned the further thought: 'What people will attempt once they will attempt a second time.' That would account for his fear, would it not? And, if we assume that he was really ill—there's plenty of evidence of that—it would account also for his gloomy forebodings. He had sent, privately, for Carpenter and told him to prepare a new will. Perhaps he argued that until the new will was signed his life remained in danger." The doctor leaned forward. "Add to all this the natural distress and dismay of a father, and especially of such a father, in discovering that his son had spent a fortune and his regret that he should have been compelled to take drastic action against his son."

Lady Oldmay sat staring in front of her. She seemed to have aged; the lines on her cheeks and round her mouth had deepened. Her hands, so vital a few minutes before, lay idle in her lap.

"If only John had understood Ned," she murmured in tones of profound sorrow.

"There's one gleam of hope," Dr. Hailey said. "Your husband sent a message to Carpenter, after this interview, telling him to do nothing until they had met again on the bathing-beach. He must have sent that message after dinner. Perhaps, therefore, something happened between him and Ned to change his attitude?"

"Yes."

The woman's voice was toneless.

"You are aware that something did happen?"

She assented.

"My husband learned why Ned had contracted his debt."

CHAPTER XVI

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

WHEN Dr. Hailey left Lady Oldmay he went to his bedroom and made a note of their conversation. She had refused to tell him the whole story of Ned's debt, but he could guess. It was this story, manifestly, which had shaken John Oldmay's resolve to disinherit his son and so prompted the note to Carpenter at the inn. Its influence seemed to have stopped there because the letters posted to Wickham and Carpenter had been written much later on the same night.

Why had he written those letters? He must have gone out hurriedly and posted them. It was necessary to imagine a mind, undecided now about its course in regard to Ned, but unshaken in its expectation of death.

"It seems clear," Dr. Hailey wrote, "that what John Oldmay heard about the circumstances in which his son's debt was contracted exerted a profound effect on him. He sent a message immediately to Carpenter (whose presence at Pyke-wood was unknown to anybody but himself). This message in effect cancelled the preparation of a new will. But the man remained under the influence of fear, as witness his letters. Was it his son whom he feared? The letter to Carpenter speaks of being hunted by some unknown enemy. Why, in his letter to Carpenter, did he omit all

mention of their meeting? Why did he write to Carpenter, seeing that he expected to meet him so soon? If he did not expect to meet Carpenter in the morning what had happened to remove that expectation from his mind? The letters to Carpenter and Wickham suggest that, when they were written, only one idea, that of impending death, was present to his mind. It is remarkable that he makes no reference of any sort to his son or his son's behaviour seeing that Ned had so recently monopolized his attention."

Dr. Hailey closed his note-book and put it in his pocket. He descended to the smoking-room where Wickham and Carpenter were still wrangling. Their point of argument had shifted from the sound of Ned's oars to the large question of the validity of circumstantial evidence. Carpenter seemed to be greatly excited.

"Because you cannot think of anybody else on whom to fasten the guilt of this crime," he cried, "you select the man who happened to be nearest at the time. That's what it amounts to."

"On the contrary," Wickham said, "I have most carefully excluded every other person who could possibly have committed the crime. I have suspected everybody in turn. It was only when I reached full assurance that not one of these people could have killed John Oldmay that I allowed my suspicion to fasten finally on Ned. As I told you in the dining-room, the position is that if Ned did not kill his father, then the case is not a case of murder. Unhappily for that view, murder, in

this instance, is certain. Circumstantial evidence lies outside of this question altogether. But there is plenty of circumstantial evidence for all that. I begin by saying that Ned is the only person who can have killed John Oldmay; I go on from that to show you the motive which actuated him, a very powerful motive; finally I point to the blood and hairs on the rowlock, the very weapon which lay ready to hand at the moment of opportunity."

The detective, who was standing in front of the fireplace, with a tumbler of whisky in his hand, turned slightly so that Dr. Hailey might have the advantage of receiving his exposition.

"Let me add this. Only one objective of any importance has been advanced against the view I am now expressing, namely that you did not notice any break in the rhythm of the oars. That has been disposed of on grounds which must carry conviction to every reasonable man. Neither you nor Hailey—and I am aware that both of you would like to exonerate Ned if it could possibly be done—can suggest a single circumstance tending to weaken in any degree the force of the suspicion which now attaches to him. For those reasons I have asked for a warrant for his arrest which I propose to execute as soon as I get it—to-night if possible."

He sipped his whisky. Dr. Hailey sat down and rested his head in his hands. He saw how excited Carpenter was and hoped that the good man would not make a scene. The spectacle of a generous enthusiasm face to face with hard facts is

depressing. Carpenter's life had been directed by his feelings and he had learned to trust them; bewilderment and indignation divided his mind that they should be set aside merely because an order of events opposed their findings.

"There must be some way of proving an innocent man innocent," he declared bitterly.

"If he is innocent."

Dr. Hailey thought of the incident in the boat about which he had just been told and felt glad that Wickham did not know about it. He wondered if he ought to intervene at all, with the scanty resources at his command. But Ned's conviction was certain if some intervention did not take place.

"Have you given enough weight," he asked the detective, "to the fact that John Oldmay changed his mind about altering his will? His message to Carpenter shows that something had happened to soften his asperity towards his son."

"It may or may not show that. How can we know what he intended to say to Carpenter?"

"We can guess from what he had said earlier in the day. We know that he proposed to disinherit his son. One can't advance farther in that direction so it's a fair inference that he intended to recede from a position which he no longer believed to be justified. Lady Oldmay has just told me that she explained to him how Ned's debts were contracted and that, after her explanation, his attitude changed. Ned was certainly aware of this

change. It seems strange, doesn't it, that he should have chosen this very time to kill his father?"

Carpenter raised his head sharply.

"Good!" he ejaculated. "Good! John did intend to disinherit Ned. He can only have sent for me the second time to rescind that order."

Wickham had set his tumbler down on the mantelpiece. He seated himself and crossed his legs.

"These, if I may say so," he remarked, "are speculations. I can speculate with as much justification and say that probably John meant to suggest some fresh name for inclusion in his will. No jury would listen to such evidence."

"You think more of juries than of justice, Wickham," Carpenter cried.

There was a knock at the door. A servant entered and announced Sergeant Robson. The policeman came thudding into the room and presented a long blue envelope to Wickham.

"The warrant?"

"Yes, sir."

Wickham rose. His face was slightly flushed but his expression threatened.

"Wait here," he ordered Robson. "I shall execute it myself and bring the prisoner to this room. Is the car at the door?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective walked to the door. As he reached it, he drew back a step. Lady Oldmay stood on the threshold.

CHAPTER XVII

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

LADY OLDMAY hurried into the room, shepherding Wickham in front of her. She signed to Carpenter to close the door, and he obeyed with alacrity.

"Please tell me what has happened?" she asked in breathless tones.

"Nothing has happened."

"Oh, dear Colonel Wickham, I know you wouldn't wish to distress me needlessly. It's uncertainty that kills, isn't it?"

Her face expressed courage as well as anxiety. She glanced at Dr. Hailey, then at Carpenter and Sergeant Robson, gathering such enlightenment as might be available, but her eyes soon returned to Wickham.

"There's a car at the door . . . are you . . . going to arrest Ned?"

"I'm afraid that is my duty."

Wickham's face reddened. It was he, not Lady Oldmay, who looked ill-at-ease. She dismissed his accusations in little, vapid gestures which routed and scattered them.

"Your duty. Poor man! I'm sorry for you." She shook her head. "But have you thought, my dear Colonel Wickham, that John was the finest swimmer *and diver* you ever knew? If one is attacked in the sea and can dive out of harm's way,

well, perhaps one dives out of harm's way, perhaps not."

She came nearer to Wickham. Her eyes were lively and the muscles of her face remained in play in a kaleidoscopic fashion, effecting a rhythm of expressions.

"A sudden blow," said Wickham, "leaves no time for diving."

"An unexpected blow leaves no time for diving."

"It comes to the same thing, doesn't it?"

"No, no. You are swimming, dear Colonel Wickham; I am rowing in a boat, I creep up behind you so quietly that you do not see me. You do not know that I am there, you think you are still alone in the sea. Then I strike you. That is the unexpected blow."

The white hands struck downwards. Lady Oldmay was discovering a histrionic talent which nobody had suspected. And the character she had chosen to play spoke English like an educated Frenchwoman. Dr. Hailey felt his enthusiasm quicken.

"If I stoop down and pick up the poker and strike you with it, that also will be an unexpected blow."

She nodded assent.

"Yes. Now I will ask you a question. The wounds on John's fingers—were they received before death or after death?"

"What do you say, Hailey?"

"Probably before death."

"So. Before death. So my husband covered his head with his hands, to ward off my son's blow that he saw coming. Tell me, if a swimmer puts up his hands he sinks, eh?"

"Does he? Not necessarily I should think."

Lady Oldmay shook her head.

"You must answer that question," she declared. "If John sank, then that blow with the rowlock didn't break his skull. If he had time to put up his hands, he had time to sink. It's not so easy to put your hands up when you're swimming. It's easier to dive, quicker too." She went back a pace. "Several blows were struck. A blow which kills sends its victim to the bottom."

She watched Wickham unflickeringly, like a rabbit in grass watching a man. She would bolt, double, lie close as occasion required.

"All these points have been considered," the detective stated. "John, I believe, swam to the boat and put his hands on the gunwale. The blow was struck while he remained in that position talking to Ned. As happens in cases of sudden, violent shock, his grip tightened in a last spasm. He continued to clutch the gunwale. It was necessary to complete the work of killing . . . to get rid of him."

"The first blow didn't kill, then?"

"Yes, it killed, but the heart must have gone on beating for a few seconds. Death was not complete when the blows on the fingers were de-

livered. Dr. Hailey will tell you that this is the usual experience in severe head injuries."

"At first you thought John had taken the blow standing. Dr. Jordan told me that. He said: 'Depend on it your husband was within his depth because otherwise the blow could not have been so effective.' But now that you know that Ned rowed straight to the boathouse, and so never came into shallow water at all, you say that John was holding on to the boat when he struck. That's having it both ways. If he was not standing, he was holding; anything so long as Ned is made guilty." She moved her hands outwards, horizontally, in a swimming stroke. "The first blow was fatal but it did not kill instantly and so the blows on the fingers were given before death as well as after. It's not good enough." She drew herself up. "And then you have to prove that men who are dead or dying grip so strongly that it is necessary to break their fingers to make them relax."

"I can't discuss the matter. . . ."

"Of course not. Listen, because I'm not finished yet. Those other blows on the head, they were given after death, were they not? After the blows on the fingers which were given before death? After that terrible grip of death had been relaxed? Did the body remain floating then, to receive them? Floating upright, too, like a living man's body?"

Wickham had regained his composure.

"Believe me," he said, "it's quite impossible in this case to fix any order for the blows. We're dealing with probabilities, not certainties. All the wounds appear to have bled a little and therefore all were inflicted before the heart had stopped. The skull was smashed; the odds are that it was smashed by the first blow, seeing that there was no resistance and no cry for help. But it's possible that it was not the first, but a subsequent blow, which smashed the skull. The only certainty is that John was killed and not drowned. When he sank he had ceased to breathe."

Lady Oldmay received this information as if she was listening to a halting excuse, a considerable achievement in face of Wickham's menace. She opened the little bag she carried and took out a letter.

"This has just been delivered," she said. "It's from Mr. Doyle, our next-door neighbour, the astronomer. He says:

"My dear Lady Oldmay,

"I have just heard that Ned's presence near the place where his father's body was found is giving rise to some ugly suspicions.

"(Mr. Doyle is under treatment at present by Dr. Jordan.)

"I am writing to you to tell you that these are baseless. It happens that, in the last week, I have taken delivery of a new telescope constructed to follow a moving object. I have been testing this instrument by watching various boats, among others that in which Ned went to lift his night-line on the morning of the tragedy. I followed Ned's boat from the place where he lifted his line to the boat-house, keeping him under observation the whole way. He rowed steadily throughout this period. Your poor hus-

band's body was at no time within the field of observation.

"May I add my deep sympathy for you in your distress?

"Yours sincerely,

"Michael Doyle."

She raised her eyes from the paper, meeting Wickham's eyes.

"You see, my dear Colonel Wickham, appearances may be deceitful."

"I saw Mr. Doyle this afternoon, on Dr. Jordan's recommendation."

"You saw him? And you dare to say that Ned is guilty!"

The detective's mouth hardened.

"Mr. Doyle showed me his telescope. It's mounted in such a way that only a small part of the bay can be seen with it—the place where John's body was found can only just be seen with Mr. Doyle's telescope. . . ."

Lady Oldmay looked at the trembling sheet of paper in her hands.

"But he says he followed Ned from the place where he lifted his night-line. He saw Ned taking the line into the boat."

"He saw Ned manipulating something, and assumed that the night-line was the occasion of that act."

"Oh, you are wicked. . . ."

"The place where the line is said to have been laid cannot be seen with Mr. Doyle's telescope. I tried to make that clear to the old man but apparently failed. He believes, as you say, that what he saw was the lifting of the line." Wickham

paused. "Mr. Doyle is a witness for the prosecution."

"What, with a telescope one cannot distinguish between the winding of a line and the striking of blows?"

"Mr. Doyle is eighty years of age. Professor Carpenter says that Ned did not stop rowing at all. Both of them cannot be right."

"I don't understand . . ."

"Mr. Doyle says that Ned lifted a fishing-line. Carpenter says that Ned did not pause. In these circumstances it is legitimate to draw conclusions from the facts themselves."

The woman rallied her courage.

"Mr. Doyle will swear that John was not near the boat."

"Can he swear that John was not swimming behind it?"

"And that Ned struck no blow . . ."

"He saw Ned raise his hand."

"Ah, to arrange his fishing-line. . . ."

"Or for some other purpose. . . ." Wickham frowned. "Believe me, I have left nothing undone that could be done to clear Ned of this charge. The case against him stands, unfortunately. If he did not strike those blows, then no human hand struck them."

"So it's true. You'll arrest him?"

"Yes."

"When, sir?"

"To-night."

"I've told him to go away. He's not here."

Lady Oldmay nodded her head, seeming to commune with herself.

"What?"

"While you're looking for him there will be time to find the real murderer of my husband."

The detective's face became rigid.

"I warn you that you are making yourself an accessory. . . ."

"Please, dear Colonel Wickham, don't trouble to tell me." She clasped her hands. "To lose a little more, what's that?"

"If Ned has run away, he has sacrificed his last chance ——"

"No. You've taken his chances, except that one."

"Has he run away?"

"Yes. Yes."

"We shall find him."

She shook her head; she replaced Mr. Doyle's letter in her bag and shut it. Dr. Hailey saw her long fingers moving in accord with some undisclosed rhythm. Wretched as this last device for saving her son appeared, her faith compelled trust in it. He almost believed she had tricks up her sleeve. The wish to help her, so attractive is courage, was rigorously renewed.

CHAPTER XVIII

A PACKET OF JEWELS

NAGGE entered the room and approached Wickham.

"You're wanted on the telephone, sir," he stated.
"A trunk call from Scotland Yard."

"Very well." The detective turned to Robson.
"Find out if Mr. Oldmay has left the house, will you?"

He strode out of the room. Dr. Hailey walked to a table on which whisky and siphons had been placed and poured himself out a peg.

"Do you suppose Ned has bolted?"

"I hope not."

"So do I."

He brought his drink to the fireplace and stood leaning against the mantelpiece.

"There's a terrible efficiency about Wickham, eh?"

"Yes."

They remained gloomily silent until the detective returned. His face, when he entered the room, betrayed an unexpected irresolution.

"It seems," he said, "that a few days before his death John received a quantity of jewellery. . . . The jewels his wife had sold to pay Ned's debts. He had bought them back. They weren't found when the place was searched."

He rang the bell as he spoke and when Nagge

answered it told him to come in and shut the door behind him.

"Did your master receive a registered packet within the last few days?" he asked the butler.

"Yes, sir."

"When?"

"By the first post one morning. Let me see, sir, two . . . three . . . four . . . four days before his death. I gave him the package when he came back from his bathe and he took it into this room."

"Before dressing?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see the packet again?"

"No, sir. Sir John shut the door when he came into this room. I saw him going upstairs a few minutes later."

"So that probably the package went into the safe over there?"

"I think so, yes."

"It isn't there now?"

"No, sir?"

"No."

Nagge shook his head. In spite of his fresh complexion and air of well-preserved age, there was an underlying suggestion of weakness in his manner. His master's death appeared to have upset his universe.

"The key of the safe was found in the pocket of his dressing-gown on the beach. Do you know if he always carried it about with him?"

"Yes, sir, always."

"So that nobody can have opened the safe."

The butler assented.

"How big was the packet?"

"It seemed quite a small packet."

"About that size?"

Wickham pointed to a cigarette box on the desk.

"Smaller than that."

"Thank you, Nagge."

When the butler had gone Wickham took a key from his pocket and opened the safe. He invited Dr. Hailey to say whether or not it contained any hidden receptacle and returned to his place behind the desk while the doctor was investigating.

"I may tell you, Hailey, that it's an old type. I don't profess to be an expert but I know that any averagely competent burglar could easily crack it."

"It hasn't been cracked."

"No."

Dr. Hailey removed some of the neat-looking papers which occupied the two shelves of the safe and examined the interior with a pocket lamp. He returned the papers.

"There's nothing here."

"Quite so. One of those documents is his will. The others are title deeds."

Dr. Hailey closed and locked the safe. He handed the small key back to Wickham. His face was severe.

"If I may say so," he remarked, "a fact like this ought to disturb you more than it seems to

have done. What, after all, do you, do we, know about John Oldmay? Could you have said off-hand that he was the kind of man who would have bought back the presents he gave his wife? Can you make even an approximate guess at his object in buying them back?"

Wickham stared, looking for a moment like a gold-fish.

"Why should I?"

"Because that's your job or your duty or whatever you like to call it. Evidently John Oldmay loved his wife. I'm prepared to bet that he loved his son too."

"You heard what Carpenter said this afternoon."

"I did. And now I've heard something which seems to contradict that evidence flatly. Carpenter told us about a man who thinks nothing of turning his son out of doors; the same man cannot endure the idea that his wife's personal trinkets should be alienated from the family. Believe me, you've got to reconcile these traits if you wish to understand John Oldmay."

The doctor took out his snuff-box and opened it.

"And then there's Ned. A boy who offends against his father's most cherished ideas but won't allow a word of criticism of his father to pass his lips. And that doctor-actor Dyke Duxford, and Lady Oldmay and Caroline. What do we know of any of them? All of them are more or less under suspicion, surely."

"None of them except Ned is under suspicion."

"My dear Wickham, if I could show you that your calculations about distance and time are incorrect, you would be compelled to suspect each of them in turn."

"Quite. But that's exactly what you can't show me. This problem, as it happens, is mathematical, not psychological. If the premises stand, the conclusion follows. It was my business to test those premises and I have tested them. The conclusion cannot be resisted."

Dr. Hailey recovered his glass of whisky from the mantelshelf and sat down.

"I made a few independent observations this afternoon," he said. "I satisfied myself that a current of considerable strength and velocity sweeps the bathing bay and sets outwards from a point near the boat-house. I watched various pieces of weed and wreckage moving seawards though the tide was flowing."

"Well?"

"It seems to me that that current may conceivably upset your calculations."

"How can it?"

Wickham frowned in spite of his attempt to look judicial.

"I'm not prepared as yet to say how it can. I had meant to keep my observations to myself till I was able to extend them. But your haste to accuse Ned makes it necessary to raise the point. John Oldmay may have been murdered much nearer the shore than you suppose."

"My dear sir, no matter how near the shore the murder took place, the murderer had no time to get away unless he ran up the beach. We know that he did not run up the beach because had he done so his footprints would have remained."

"Don't forget that the boat-house holds two boats."

Wickham looked puzzled. He glanced from Dr. Hailey to Carpenter who was leaning forward in an attitude of tense eagerness.

"Two boats? What has that got to do with it?" he demanded.

"Sir John left this house at 7.25. That fact is well attested. I've paced the distance to the beach. It's just possible that he entered the water at 7.29. Suppose the murderer was afloat at that moment, in the second boat, waiting to receive him? Suppose further that he waded out to the boat to speak to the murderer—I am assuming of course that they knew one another. It was now 7.31; four minutes remained before Carpenter's appearance on the scene: one minute for the murder, three minutes in which to reach the boat-house. If the murder took place well in shore, the boat-house could, as I satisfied myself this afternoon, be reached in three minutes, or even less."

"What does that prove? The murderer didn't stay in the boat-house."

"Again, my dear Wickham, observation has enabled me to answer you. As you know the dunes extend down practically to the boat-house. I satisfied myself that, from where Carpenter was wait-

ing, it is not possible to see the boat-house door, though you can see almost the whole of the house itself. The reason is that one of the hillocks of sand is slightly higher than its neighbours. Anyone leaving the boat-house could make his way through the dunes without showing himself at all to a watcher posted where Carpenter was posted—as I shall prove to you to-morrow morning. Carpenter believed he held the boat-house in full view because, unlike me, he was not concerned to analyse that impression.”

The doctor turned to Carpenter allowing Wickham a moment in which to rally his forces.

“Yes, yes, Hailey, that’s sound. Absolutely sound,” Carpenter exclaimed. “Of course, it never entered my head to analyse any impression. I was only concerned to see John without letting Ned see me. Ned had his back to me, but I was afraid he might stop rowing and turn round.”

“He had his back also to his father?”

“Yes, of course he had. If your theory is correct, Ned saw nothing of the murder. Thank Heaven, we’re getting to the truth at last.”

Carpenter’s relief contrasted strikingly with Wickham’s discomfiture. Suddenly, however, the detective’s brow cleared.

“You seem to have forgotten Professor Doyle and his telescope. The telescope does give an excellent view of the boat-house.”

“But was not, at that moment, directed upon the boat-house. Doyle stated positively that he continued to follow Ned’s boat. If so, he may

easily have overlooked another boat sailing near the shore for such a very short period of time."

"Only Ned had any reason to wish his father out of the way."

Dr. Hailey bent forward.

"Let me remind you of those jewels. The police took charge of Sir John's dressing-gown. But we have still to hear when they found the key of the safe. Somebody who wanted that key and knew where to find it, may have taken occasion to borrow it for a few moments after the dressing-gown was brought back to this house."

CHAPTER XIX

THE PERFECT BUTLER

WICKHAM was not the man to refuse to face facts. He rang the bell and asked Nagge if Sergeant Robson was still waiting.

"Yes, sir."

"Tell him I want him."

Robson came hurrying in full of the information that Ned Oldmay had left the Hall by car two hours earlier. He did not try to hide his astonishment when Wickham cut short his statement by a demand for exact details about the disposal of Sir John's dressing-gown.

"I brought it back to the Hall myself, sir."

"Yes, and after that?"

"I put it in this room, on that arm-chair where Professor Carpenter is sitting."

"Had you searched the pockets?"

The man's face became blank.

"No, sir."

"When did you search them?"

"After the doctor came."

"When?"

"It would be about one or two o'clock."

"So that the dressing-gown lay here for hours?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you lock the door of this room?"

"No, sir."

"Had you any idea, at that time, that the key of the safe over there was in the pocket of the dressing-gown?"

"No, sir."

"Who told you the key was in the pocket of the dressing-gown?"

"Nobody told me. I found them there. I guessed it must be the key of the safe because Sir John had taken it with him to the beach."

"Send Nagge here, will you?"

The butler looked greatly alarmed, but he closed the door noiselessly and crossed the floor as though he carried a tray of cocktails.

"Yes, sir?"

"You suggested, Nagge, that you were the only person who knew that Sir John had received the registered packet the other day?"

"No, sir. I said that I had handed the packet to Sir John when he returned from bathing. The post comes before half-past seven as a rule. The packet was lying on the hall table from that time till Sir John returned a few minutes before eight."

"Well?"

"There was a letter for Miss Caroline and a letter for Mr. Duxford. Both these letters had gone when I gave Sir John his packet. Mr. Duxford was walking in the drive and Miss Caroline was in the breakfast room."

"So that they saw the packet?"

"Yes, sir. They must have done."

"Was there any name on the packet?"

"Yes, sir. The name of a jeweller in London."

"Can you remember it?"

"No, sir. I just happened to notice the word 'Jewellers' on the label. It was the kind of packet that you might expect to come from a jeweller's shop."

Wickham nodded. He considered a moment and then asked:

"When did Mr. Duxford return from hunting on the day Sir John was killed?"

"Before luncheon, sir."

"And Miss Caroline?"

"Miss Caroline wasn't hunting that day, sir."

"Was she present at luncheon?"

"No, sir. Neither her nor her ladyship. Mr. Ned was present and Mr. Duxford."

"Did Mr. Duxford come into this room before luncheon?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Did you come into this room during that morning?"

"No, sir."

"You're sure?" Wickham's tone menaced.

"I'm quite sure, sir. The police were using this room and I told the servants not to go into it. I wouldn't go in myself if I had told them not to go in, unless, of course, the police happened to send for me."

"How long have you been in Sir John's employment, Nagge?"

"Seven years, sir."

"You know that Mr. Ned had quarrelled with his father?"

Nagge's fat face became solemn. He closed his eyes.

"I was afraid something was amiss."

"From what you had heard?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you hear?"

The butler shook his head.

"My calling, sir," he declared, "has its rules like any other. One of these rules is that we don't repeat what we hear. A butler should have no ears except for orders."

The words were spoken with dignity. They made Wickham blink behind his spectacles.

"No doubt," he said dryly. "But in this case professional rules do not apply. We're investigating a murder. I must ask you to tell me what you heard."

Nagge drew himself up. In this posture he resembled a large white rat sniffing at the bars of its cage.

"If her ladyship consents, I will tell you," he declared.

"Take care, my good man."

The butler took a very large handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his brow.

"I am prepared, sir, to abide by the consequences of my decision," he stated.

Wickham scowled.

"I hold a warrant," he stated, "for Mr. Ned's arrest on the charge of murder. I warn you that it is a criminal offence to shelter a suspected murderer."

"Pardon me, sir, if I suggest that your legal information is at fault. No man is compelled to give evidence except in a court of law." Again the butler wiped his brow. "What's a man," he added, "but his word?"

There was an exhortatory expression in his eye, which suggested that he was about to explain his moral outlook. The detective made a peremptory gesture.

"This was Sir John's room, wasn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Did he usually sit here alone?"

"As a rule, yes. Sometimes her ladyship sat with him."

"She sat with him on the night before his death?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see them together?"

"Yes, sir, when I brought in the whisky and siphons at half-past ten o'clock."

"There was nobody else in the room?"

"No, sir."

"Had there been anybody else in the room?"

"That I can't say."

"Can't say? Do you mean won't say?"

"I can't say, sir."

"Do you know that Mr. Ned has bolted?"

"Mr. Ned left the house by car this evening, sir."

"Um, you do know. The Oldmay family is to be

congratulated on possessing the most discreet butler in Britain."

Wickham sneered but the compliment was not thereby tarnished. Nagge bent his unbendable neck.

"I thank you, sir."

He retired as quietly as he had come. Nobody heard the door shut.

"Good fellow!" said Carpenter fervently.

Wickham smiled a little, then turned and stood looking into the fireplace while he filled his pipe. Dr. Hailey saw him when his pipe was full, raise his eyes to the black knights on the upper mantelshelf.

"Funny that a man with such a butler should have bought these iniquitous things," he remarked. "John could be distinguished and also incredibly vulgar. I suppose he thought they rounded off his armoury. I'm going up to Ned's bedroom to look round," he added. "I want you both to come with me."

The room declared its owner. Everything in it was very plain and very costly. But there were splashes of another quality. The bed, which Wickham duly felt, was hard; the carpet was unusually soft. Three separate wardrobes, of the newest form, mothered Ned's clothes. Wickham opened all the drawers he could see but discovered only large numbers of silk shirts, collars, vests, neckties, waistcoats. He turned to the wardrobes and disclosed hunting pink among tweeds and flannels and then, in another wardrobe, morning and eve-

ning clothes. There were a few boxes on the dressing-table but they contained waistcoat buttons and studs.

"What are you looking for?" Dr. Hailey asked.

He got no reply. The detective was going through the pockets of the various garments. He worked quickly, without hurry, but found nothing. He walked into the bathroom which was attached to the bedroom. A moment later they heard him exclaim. He returned to the bedroom carrying two jewel-cases.

"They were in the pocket in his dressing-gown."

He put the cases on the toilet table and opened the larger. It contained a diamond necklace. The smaller case contained two large emeralds set as ear-rings. He took the jewels in his hands and examined them under the lamp. Then he passed them to Dr. Hailey.

"As an expert?"

The doctor raised his eyeglass and focused it on the diamonds. Then he glanced at the emeralds.

"The necklace is perfect. These diamonds are flawless. They can't be worth less than £18,000 to £20,000. The emeralds are not, I think, so good, but emeralds always fetch their price."

"I've seen Gertrude Oldmay wearing those diamonds." Wickham raised his head sharply and faced the doctor. "Can you suggest any reason why Ned should be in possession of these jewels?"

"No."

"Except that he took them from his father's safe on the morning of the murder. He knew

where the key of the safe was. It was a good idea to hide the cases in his dressing-gown. The last garment anybody but a trained detective would think of searching."

"Why should Ned wish to take these jewels after his father's death?"

"A man who has murdered his father is not likely to have any scruples about robbing his mother."

They heard quick steps in the corridor. Ned walked into the room. Dr. Hailey saw him start slightly when he observed the jewels but he recovered his self-control immediately.

"Nagge told me you wished to speak to me," he said addressing Wickham.

"I did, yes."

The detective took the jewels from Dr. Hailey and replaced them carefully in their cases. He laid the cases, closed, on the table.

"I found these," he remarked in quiet tones, "in the pocket of your dressing-gown."

"Yes."

"May I ask why you put them there?"

Ned shrugged his shoulders.

"If you tell me why you searched my pockets?"

Wickham took a step forward and then checked himself.

"I searched your pockets because I suspected that I should find these jewels. I found them."

"I see. I put the jewels in my pocket to prevent you finding them, sir."

Ned was flushed. His face, which had not yet

wholly lost its boyish plumpness, betrayed no fear. He smiled.

"Why?"

"I think, sir, you must find that out for yourself."

"You know that I hold a warrant for your arrest."

"Yes, sir."

"On the charge of murder?"

"Yes, sir."

"That warrant entitles me to search your pockets. It entitles me to ask questions. Believe me, you'll serve your own interests by being frank."

"Frank about what?"

"About the way these jewels came into your possession."

"They haven't come into my possession."

The detective glared.

"Are you suggesting that your father made you a present of them?"

"Certainly not."

"Your mother then?"

"No, sir."

"You decided to bolt earlier in the evening, didn't you?"

"I considered the matter."

Wickham crossed the room and rang the bell.

"I'm about to give orders," he said, "that you are to be kept under surveillance."

CHAPTER XX

A CONFESSION

DR. HAILEY did not return to the study with Wickham and Carpenter. Further discussion, he recognized was useless and he felt the need of clearing his mind. Dyke Duxford was awaiting him in his bedroom.

"I felt I must see you. . . ."

"Sit down, please."

Duxford seemed to be greatly agitated. He kept mopping his brow but it gleamed again as soon as he had mopped it. A lively play of expression troubled his features.

"I've just heard of Wickham's decision to arrest Ned. Believe me, it came as a frightful shock. Frightful. A ghastly mistake, of course. Ned's utterly incapable of such a thing."

Dr. Hailey sat down on his bed. His cheerless countenance offered no consolation.

"Wickham feels quite sure of himself," he said.

"But, my dear doctor, Ned's the kindest fellow in the world. He adored his father, worshipped him. And his mother too. People don't kill without provocation."

"No."

"Can nothing be done? Surely we aren't going to sit and watch such a dreadful miscarriage of justice?"

Dr. Hailey took snuff.

"Unfortunately," he said, "if Ned is to be saved somebody else must be found to shoulder the guilt. And there's nobody else—apart at least from a slender idea that I've already communicated to Wickham. As the facts stand at present, Ned must have killed his father."

"What!"

"Ned must have killed him, seeing that he was killed."

"No."

"Nobody except Ned can have been near him at the time."

Duxford jumped up and began to fret about the room. He suggested a not very wild animal in a cage.

"You know," he asked, "that Caroline and I are engaged to be married?"

"I heard something."

"It's true." He came and stood in front of the doctor. One of his eloquent gestures conjured up a desert-place big enough to hold his passion. "My love for Caroline is me, myself. If it dies, I die. Do you understand? But of course not." His hands reached his heart. "Caroline is sacred. She must not suffer; she must not shed so much as a tear. Ah, you have not been in love, Dr. Hailey."

There was much melancholy in his aspect as well as a busy agitation. He seemed to weigh some matter in his mind.

"You know that Ned was in debt?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Do you know the details of the transaction which put him in debt?"

"No."

"I'll tell you. Ned went surety for me to enable me to produce a film of Macbeth, with myself as Macbeth. A Jew put up the money."

Duxford's face underwent a sudden and remarkable change. His eyes flashed and his mouth set in a hard and proud expression. Dr. Hailey recognized *the Sheik*.

"My Macbeth was something quite new, a man, not a coward, strong, brave, above all, a lover. It was for Lady Macbeth he sinned; the struggle at Duncan's bedroom door was not between ambition and cowardice but between love and the horror of a foul deed. Do you follow?"

The doctor said that he followed.

"Will you believe it, the critics refused my reading of the part? Ignorance, prejudice, convention leagued themselves against me. 'Desert Love at Dunsinane', one of them called my work. Result: next to no bookings. The Jew began to press for his money and when I asked for time—because I believe in the film with all my heart—applied to Ned. Imagine my feelings, Caroline's feelings! But what could I do? We didn't dare to tell Uncle John. Ned would have been summoned if Aunt Gertrude hadn't sold her jewels."

Duxford wiped his brow.

"Ned didn't utter a single word of complaint. Never reproached, never criticized. That's friendship, eh? Friendship with a capital F. 'My dear

old chap,' I said. 'I can't bear it. As an artist and a man. I've given 'em the real Macbeth, Shakespeare's Macbeth, finely put on—we did all the scenes in Scotland—finely acted, though I say it, finely acted and they prefer their illusions.' I can see him now. He didn't need to tell me that it was the artist he pitied most of all. I knew. 'Ned, old man,' I said, 'your money isn't lost. Never say that. You've struck a blow for the truth. And the truth can't be hid, whatever those fellas may say. Some day the work you've made possible's bound to come to its own.'

"That was in London, a month ago. Ned had come up with Aunt Gertrude's necklace and things. We fixed up with the jeweller who bought them that they weren't to be sold again for a year, so that if Macbeth pulled round after all, we could buy them back again."

Duxford struck his brow, shedding Macbeth in favour of business.

"I happened to hear that Uncle John was a big shareholder in cinema theatres. I had an idea: if I could convince him, I might be able to override the managers and turn defeat into victory. I wrote to Aunt Gertrude and got myself invited up here. Caroline and I gave the murder scene at a concert in the village hall a week ago. Success? My dear doctor, it was tremendous. These simple folk understand their Shakespeare—when they get the real Shakespeare—as well as Shakespeare understood them. Audience was absolutely spell-bound. Spell-bound! Caroline was wonder-

ful." He shook his head. "Wonderful! With her colouring she scarcely needed any make-up. What a contrast, too, to myself! That fair skin of hers, her red hair, her expression of innocence to offset my bearded, grizzled face. No wonder Macbeth loved this implacable girl who loved nothing but power."

Duxford's eloquence flushed him. His "screen face" appeared again and he stretched out his hands.

"How is't with me, when every noise appals me?
What hands are here? Ha, they pluck out mine eyes!
Will all great Neptune's oceans wash this blood
Clean from my hand?"

"But he has murdered Duncan; it's not a true repentance. Strong men usually collapse when they've spent themselves. Didn't Napoleon weep when he won battles? That night, while he was still under the influence of my asking, I told Uncle John that I had modelled my study of Macbeth on him. It was true. 'I tried to look like you, to think like you, to act like you,' I said, 'because you're the strongest man I know intimately.' Maybe he was a little shocked, but I think he was flattered as well. I told him about my film and got a promise that he would do what he could to help me. Then the crash came."

The actor sank into a chair. A gesture waved Macbeth back to oblivion.

"Uncle John discovered that Aunt Gertrude had sold her jewels to pay Ned's debts. I don't know the details, but I do know that Ned kept my

name out of it. Think of it, he allowed his father to believe that he had spent the money himself; even after Uncle John had told him to leave the house! I didn't hear anything till the day before Uncle John's death. Caroline told me. I went to Uncle John. He was sitting alone in his study with his head in his hands. He looked broken. But the moment I mentioned Ned he jumped up. 'Don't!' he shouted. I'm not easily frightened, but he frightened me. His eyes were bloodshot and there was sweat running down his cheeks. 'You're ill, Uncle,' I said. He didn't seem to hear. He walked towards me, repeating the word 'Don't!' I gathered my courage and blurted out: 'Ned spent that money on my film of Macbeth.'

"I tried to put pride in my words because I felt pride. He stopped in his walk and stood staring at me, like a man whose thoughts have been scattered. 'What?' he cried. I repeated my words. I saw a gleam of understanding in his eyes and began to hope that I had succeeded. 'Do you mean to say Ned was mad enough to finance a film?' 'Yes, sir. My film of Macbeth.' The blood rushed up to his brow. 'Did you ask him to finance you?' 'I did.' 'Because you're engaged to Caroline?' 'Certainly not.' He was glaring at me. I tried to explain, but that was useless. His anger was boiling. 'You're a scoundrel,' he shouted. 'Get out of my house and never show your face in it again. Caroline shall not marry you!'

"He looked dangerous, but I stood my ground. 'She shall marry me.' 'I say, no.' He came at me

again. He seized me by the throat and pushed me against the door. I felt my breath sticking in my throat and when I tried to cry out no sound came from my lips. Suddenly, he released me. I staggered out of the room. Caroline was waiting for me in the hall."

Dr. Hailey leaned forward.

"When was that?"

"Just before dinner."

"Did you know that your uncle had sent for Professor Carpenter to change his will?"

"No."

"He had. Carpenter stayed at the inn in Pyke-wood. Before you confessed to your uncle he had disinherited Ned. After you confessed he sent Carpenter a note telling him to come to the bathing-beach next morning."

Duxford looked bewildered.

"I don't understand."

"Your confession made your uncle change his mind about disinheriting Ned." Dr. Hailey put his eyeglass in his eye. "Did your uncle seem to be afraid?"

"It didn't strike me that he was afraid."

"You said he looked distressed."

"Oh, yes, almost broken down. Uncle John had a horror of debt that amounted to a monomania. Besides, he was dreadfully upset about the sale of Aunt Gertrude's jewels. Caroline told me that he seemed to think his wife and family were in league against him. He was always apt to suspect people of being secretly hostile."

"Still, that wouldn't make him afraid."

"No."

"How did he seem at dinner?"

"He looked ill. His face was rather yellow and his eyes were puffy. I remember wondering if he was sickening for typhoid, because I had seen that appearance in typhoid cases and as you know excessive sensual acuity is common in the early stages of that fever. He was wonderfully calm though, considering what had just happened. Aunt Gertrude tried to get him to talk, but he said very little."

"Were Ned and Caroline at dinner?"

"Caroline was. Not Ned."

"Did you hear the story about the bung coming out of the boat a few days earlier when Ned and your uncle were fishing?"

"Yes. Uncle John pretended to think that Ned had tried to drown him."

"It's possible, isn't it, that he may have recalled the incident when he found out about Ned's debts?"

"I scarcely think so."

"His death would have solved all Ned's difficulties ——"

Duxford shook his head.

"Uncle John knew that Ned adored him."

"You're quite sure of that?"

"I'm absolutely sure."

"Still, the fact that your aunt had had her jewels copied and had sold them must have upset

him very much. It showed at any rate that both his son and his wife were ready to deceive him."

Duxford spread out his hands.

"Not necessarily. They didn't wish to upset him."

"I think that, in the same circumstances, I should feel that there was a total lack of confidence between my family and myself. Perhaps even a lack of affection."

"Uncle John may have felt that. He was apt to feel slighted."

"I might even have wondered if my family wished to get rid of me."

"I've heard him say that he thought they would be happier without him. He was a snob at heart and always felt, I think, that Aunt Gertrude looked down on him as a tradesman."

"The sale of the jewels would confirm that idea?"

"Possibly. Everything confirmed it."

Dr. Hailey allowed his eyeglass to drop.

"Did he have the same feelings about Caroline?"

There was a moment of silence. The actor's face darkened.

"Not until the last night of his life," he said in low tones.

CHAPTER XXI

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

DUXFORD lit a cigarette without asking permission to do so. He flung the match towards the fireplace, but it fell on the carpet.

"Caroline," he declared, "was the only person in this house who really understood Uncle John. She was the only person who wasn't in the least afraid of him. She could see through the Scot to the man." He made a grimace which recalled a child in despair about the dullness of its elders. "Uncle John was a big baby, who hadn't even the self-confidence to say he wanted mothering. He always waited for people to tell him they loved him and, of course, very few people ever did. Those who did got growls for their trouble because he wasn't taking anything from anybody, thank you. I imagine it all dated back to his boyhood; my father told me that his brothers and sisters found him very difficult to live with. It got worse as he grew older. 'Nobody loves me,' was the idea that was perpetually in his mind.

"But Caroline did love him and Caroline kept on telling him so. Called his bluff from morning till night and never let him get away with it. If he sulked she sat on his chair and hugged him. Kissed him. Looked after his comfort, too. Hadn't a taste she didn't know and didn't supply. I've heard her scold and pet and praise him, all

in a couple of minutes. He loved it. Growled, protested; and loved it." Duxford broke off and inhaled smoke deeply. "You're not to misunderstand when I say that it was Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in a different form. Caroline had everything that Uncle John admired and desired in the world. And she was his daughter. He believed everything she told him. He did everything she told him. Doing things for her affected him tremendously. I'm not sure whether it affected her in quite the same way. Women who make good mothers are like men who make good surgeons. Sentiment isn't allowed to interfere with craftsmanship.

"But I must qualify that or you'll get a wrong impression." He knelt on a chair and leaned over the back of it. "There were places in my uncle's life into which Caroline didn't go. Couldn't go. Wasn't admitted, perhaps. His relationship to Ned was one of those places. He was always hard on Ned; though he knew very well that Ned worshipped him, he pretended to think that there was no love in the worship. They weren't easy in each other's company and even Caroline couldn't make them easy. Caroline, who loves Ned. I've heard her very often telling him not to be afraid of his father and especially not to be afraid of showing his father his affection, but it was no good. Ned was afraid and he couldn't get over it. If Uncle John came into a room, Ned crumpled up like a shot rabbit."

There was a pause. Dr. Hailey offered no comment.

"That's how things were," Duxford went on, "when this wretched trouble about the jewels began and Uncle John ordered Ned out of the house. Something happened to Caroline then. She came to me and told me to go at once to her father and confess everything. Her face was still, without expression. Her eyes seemed quite vacant. 'Put the blame on me,' she said, 'because I suggested that Ned should help you.' Naturally I protested. 'You don't understand,' she told me, 'father can be brutal as well as kind.' When she heard that he wasn't to be moved and was going to send me away too all her listlessness vanished. I noticed a great change in her and it frightened me. After dinner, she said: 'I'm going to talk to him. You're to come with me.' I tried to dissuade her, but it was useless.

"Uncle John was alone, just as I had found him earlier in the evening. Only he seemed more depressed. Caroline walked across to his desk and stood in front of it. 'Dyke told you,' she said, 'about Ned's debts.' He looked up, frowning. 'Yes, and I told him you should not marry him.' 'I'm going to marry him. I'm going to marry him!' She was speaking very quietly. He stood up. 'So you're against me, too, are you?' 'I'm not against you, father; but I love Ned and Dyke.' 'All of you against me. All of you. Wife and children.' A sob broke from his lips. 'You deceive me, you betray me, rob me, defy me.' Caroline

broke down as soon as her anger died away. The reaction was terrible. Terrible! She said: 'I believe I've killed him.' "

"What?"

"It was like Lady Macbeth in the sleep-walking scene."

Silence fell in the room; they heard the gulls making merry on the shore.

"What she told her father was the truth?" the doctor asked.

"It was the truth."

"Did it strike you that he recognized it as such?"

"He seemed frightened at the end. Desperate almost. I wanted to cry 'Mercy.' I couldn't get rid of the idea that he was ill and that it wasn't quite fair."

"Egoism," Dr. Hailey said, "is unquenchable. That kind of vanity never recognizes itself."

He sat down again on the bed, after Duxford left him. A vague sense of having missed an important clue troubled his mind. But he could not remedy the failure.

CHAPTER XXII

A LONELY MAN

A FEW minutes later Duxford returned in agitation to Dr. Hailey's bedroom.

"My aunt," he exclaimed, "would like you to come and see Caroline."

The doctor had not begun to undress. He followed Duxford along the corridor to the door of Caroline's room. The actor stopped here.

"My aunt is in the room. I haven't seen Caroline myself. Aunt Gertrude thinks she's on the edge of a nervous breakdown."

Dr. Hailey knocked lightly on the door and then entered the bedroom. A dim light was burning under a green shade and for a moment he could not see anyone clearly. He shut the door and walked towards the bed. Lady Oldmay rose to meet him. She held up a warning hand and led him to the end of the room farthest from the bed.

"She seems to think, my dear doctor, that she may be responsible in some way for her father's death. I've been trying to reassure her."

Dr. Hailey walked to the bed and sat down in the chair which Lady Oldmay had just vacated. Caroline lay with wide-open eyes, watching him; but did not give any sign of recognition. He took her hand and felt her pulse.

"You're not able to sleep?"

She moved at the sound of his voice and then seemed to rouse herself. A deep sigh escaped her lips.

"I'm all right."

Her manner was not gracious. He sat back in his chair at a loss to proceed. Lady Oldmay emerged from the shadows which surrounded the bed.

"I asked Dr. Hailey to see you, dear, because he's a specialist in nerve troubles. I thought he might be able to give you something. I've told him what it is that's distressing you."

Caroline sighed again, but made no response. The doctor leaned towards her.

"Nothing can be more certain," he declared, "than that your father was killed. The fact that he went out to bathe shows that he was in his usual spirits."

"Ned didn't kill him."

"I agree."

"So he must have killed himself."

Lady Oldmay made an impatient movement, but immediately checked herself.

"Certainly not," the doctor said.

"Nobody else can possibly have killed him."

"My dear girl, he cannot possibly have killed himself."

Caroline sat up.

"He could have injured himself by diving from the platform in the boat-house," she declared.

"Perhaps. But in that case his body would have remained in the boat-house."

She drew her hand across her brow.

"That's only theory."

"You're entirely mistaken. It's ascertained fact. Your father did not meet his death in the boat-house."

"How did he meet his death?" She turned as she spoke, gazing into the doctor's face.

"From a series of blows on the head."

"I don't think so."

"Facts are facts, you know."

"Somebody must have struck the blows."

"Quite so."

"And yet there was nobody there . . . except Ned."

"So far as we know at present."

The girl raised her head sharply.

"How can you ever know more than you know at present?" she asked.

"I mean to go on investigating."

She shook her head.

"If father didn't kill himself, Ned must have killed him."

"Your father didn't kill himself."

"I say Ned didn't kill him."

She began to tremble as if seized with a shivering fit.

"I didn't tell you the truth when you questioned me this morning," she said. "I told you I didn't see father going to bathe. I did see him. I hadn't slept well and I got up much earlier than usual and went for a walk. I was coming up the avenue, behind the postman, when father came out of the

front door. I didn't want him to see me, so I stood behind a tree. I watched him till he was out of sight among the dunes."

She sighed again and again clutched at her brow.

"You needn't tell me he was in his usual spirits. Father always walked like a young man, but I saw that his nerves were keyed up to a terrible pitch. His steps were jerky and he held his head stiffly as if his muscles were tense. That wouldn't have struck an outsider; father's carriage was so characteristic, he was so much himself, so different from other people that nobody who didn't know him intimately would have observed these little changes. They terrified me. . . ."

She caught at the doctor's hand.

"I felt my heart sink. The night before I had quarrelled with father about Ned and said cruel things. I knew, while I watched, that my cruelty had wounded him."

"One is apt to see what one expects to see, you know."

Caroline released Dr. Hailey's hand and lay back on the pillows.

"You don't understand. When people love one another, there's a bond between them. Words aren't needed; the smallest movement, the most insignificant gesture speaks. Why should I have felt afraid?"

"Because of the quarrel."

"No, because fear came only when I saw father; until then I hadn't felt the slightest fear."

Dr. Hailey considered a moment.

"Our minds need an object, something to focus upon."

"Would you say that if somebody you loved told you he was in distress?"

"Possibly."

"I don't think so. His distress would become yours. That's what happened to me. I wanted to run after father and tell him how sorry I was. I didn't do it because I was afraid he would be angry. The thought in my mind was that I mustn't lose any time, because he's so unhappy. If only I had realized that my chance of making amends was passing for ever."

Her voice broke. She closed her eyes to hide the tears that filled them. The doctor found it difficult to identify her with the woman about whose cruel logic Duxford had told him, but was conscious, nevertheless, that the two attitudes were congruous. Caroline had not, probably, over-estimated the effect she had produced on her father's feelings. It was inevitable that she should grieve to have inflicted wounds so distressful. He was considering how best to discount her remorse when she sat up again:

"Don't forget," she exclaimed, "that we were all against father on the last day of his life. Mother had sold her diamonds to help Ned because Ned daren't ask father to help him. He could guess from that what our real feelings were towards him. His rage against Ned wasn't due solely to Ned's debts. Nor to mother's sale of her

jewels. Its real cause was in his own heart—the knowledge that we feared him and had reason to fear him. He was alone, shut up in our fear, isolated. And yet how good he had been to all of us! He must have thought of his kindness to us as well as of our fear and distrust of him. I know I should have in his position. What failure, to love people and be feared by them. To love without awakening love in response. I'm sure that during the last day of his life father felt crushed and broken. His anger was only an excuse to himself for carrying on."

She leaned towards the doctor, holding him silent.

"He used to say that Ned was mother's son, but that I was his daughter. I think he must have counted, that last day, on my sympathy. I would understand his anger and forgive it. I would make him feel that we didn't really distrust or fear him. I had often done that before. But he quarrelled with Dyke and forbade my marriage to Dyke. I forgot everything but his injustice."

She shook her head sadly.

"The better you understand people the more terribly you can hurt them. After I left him father must have felt completely cut off. Worse than that he must have felt that nobody understood him. He had lived for us, worked, saved, slaved for us. What was there left to live for? He wasn't the kind who can live for abstract ideas. He was simple, affectionate like a big child. He needed home life, his health, his folk. He

needed to meddle in his home things, to interfere and fuss and worry, to be glad, to be angry, to be afraid. He was grotesquely afraid of poverty, of debt, of any illegal action. He was constantly picturing Ned in one sort of trouble or another, and planning how to rescue him. I know so well why he sent for Professor Carpenter. Ned wasn't to have a penny; mother and I were to get everything. So Ned would have to wait for his money till mother's death. It was only an extra precaution to save Ned from himself. But it was dressed up to look hard and brutal. Poor father! He even pretended to be afraid of Ned. I know that it was himself he was really afraid of. Why should he have been in such a desperate hurry to make that new will?"

The question rang out, startling the listeners. Caroline's big eyes challenged the darkness in which her mother's face appeared as a dim outline.

"I think," Dr. Hailey said, "that he was unwell and that he had become a prey to unreasonable fears."

"He knew Ned was incapable of hurting him. I am absolutely certain that he was never really afraid of Ned for a single instant. No, there was another fear. The fear that lurks in the hearts of lonely men. Remember it was after he found out about the sale of the diamonds that he sent for Professor Carpenter. Mother had sold his gifts to prevent his learning the truth about his own son. Worse than that, the jewels had been

copied to prevent his learning the truth about mother. Don't you see, there was to be no more meddling for him in his family's affairs, no more fussing or interfering or helping? His usefulness was finished."

Caroline lay back again. But she continued to watch Dr. Hailey. He rose from his seat at the bedside.

"I can't dispute your reading of your father's character," he said. "But I do know that what you say throws no light on the manner of his death. Your father died from violent blows sustained while he was bathing. That is to say, sustained in circumstances in which suicide can be ruled out. He was murdered suddenly, and brutally, and seems to have made a strong effort to save himself. His fingers, broken in an attempt to protect his head, are evidence of that. What is the use of discussing suicide in the face of these facts? What is the use of worrying yourself? Whatever his feelings may have been, your father was anxious to go on living since he defended his life."

CHAPTER XXIII

MOTHER AND SON

LADY OLDMAY accompanied Dr. Hailey out of Caroline's room and conducted him to her private sitting-room. She looked shaken, but had not lost her self-control.

"I do thank you, dear Dr. Hailey," she exclaimed, "for what you've just told Caroline. And not only because of Caroline; because of myself, too. These last days have been terrible."

She sat down; a slight movement of her hand invited him to do the same, but he remained standing.

"Caroline," he said, "is paying the penalty which attaches to quick temper. Duxford told me about the scene between her and her father."

"All the same, she told you the truth. And she isn't the only one who has suffered. The idea that John was driven to his death has haunted me all day. If only I hadn't tried to deceive him about those jewels. If only I had told him the truth at the beginning. He would have been angry, of course; but he would have forgiven Ned. He would have arranged matters, settled everything, very likely made a much better bargain than I made. And it would have given him such great happiness. I knew all that; but I grudged him his interference in Ned's affairs. I hated to think of the pleasure it would give him. Ned was

mine; I could not bear that he should be humiliated to flatter his father's vanity."

She shook her head, keeping her eyes averted.

"I don't feel like that now. I have no irritation against John any more."

The doctor rubbed his eyeglass between his finger and thumb.

"Did you know that your jewels, the originals, were bought back by Sir John?"

"What!"

"They were delivered to him here some days before his death."

Lady Oldmay rose. The blood fluttered in her cheeks as though her natural pallor had been wounded. She advanced a step towards Dr. Hailey.

"Impossible!"

"There is no doubt about it. I have seen the jewels myself, this evening." He put his eyeglass in his eye. "Colonel Wickham found them, a short time ago, in a pocket of Ned's dressing-gown. Ned acknowledged that they were genuine."

The woman tottered. She put her hand on his arm to steady herself. Then her courage reasserted its power.

"He bought them back . . ." she murmured.

"Yes."

"Why did he not tell me that he had bought them?"

"I don't know."

She drew her hand across her eyes as if banishing an evil dream.

"He gave them to Ned?"

"I don't think so."

"But you said they were found in his pocket?"

"Yes."

Her eyes became troubled.

"How could Ned have them if they weren't given to him?"

"I don't know. He had them."

"John would keep such things locked in his safe. He wore the key of his safe on a chain round his neck. . . ."

"Except when he was bathing."

She started.

"Yes. That's true. I had forgotten. He always took the key to the beach with him. I used to laugh at his caution."

Dr. Hailey nodded.

"Exactly. It was found by the police in his dressing-gown about midday on the day he was killed. The dressing-gown had been lying for some hours in the study. Wickham's suggestion is that Ned borrowed the key in order to take the jewels."

"What nonsense! Why should Ned take the jewels?"

"So far as I can see there's no reason why he should have taken them."

Lady Oldmay sat down again.

"His father's death has made Ned a rich man. That's the answer to this accusation. Rich men, even the most unscrupulous, don't steal their mother's diamonds."

"Quite so. Therefore it is important to know why Ned took the jewels or if he didn't take them, how he became possessed of them. It's rather curious, don't you think, that he told you nothing about them?"

Lady Oldmay was gazing into the empty fireplace. She turned her head sharply.

"I don't think so," she said softly. "Ned knew what memories these jewels would bring. I'm sure he would do his best to hide from me that his father re-purchased them—for the present at any rate. He knows how bitterly I regret having sold them."

She leaned back in her chair. Her face, usually so expressive, became drawn and vacant-looking.

"During the last day of John's life," she said, "I became dreadfully frightened about him. I can't describe the feeling but it clutched at my heart. Suppose I had driven him too far! He looked so ill, so weary, so disappointed. I kept recalling the occasions on which he had given me those wonderful jewels, the days of our early married life when he was my lover. John had the deep feelings of his race and the possessive instincts of his race. How had I dared to sell his gifts? To cheat him with imitations of them? It's strange how one feeling can displace another. A few weeks before I had been glad to have those imitations made and to think that he would be deceived by them. My hatred of his treatment of Ned was blazing then.

"Ned found me crying. I told him the truth. I

begged him to help me to put things right with his father. His distress was as great as mine, but I think it was due more to my distress than to any fear he had about his father. 'I've let you in for this, mother,' he said, 'and it breaks my heart. You must promise me not to change towards father when I've gone.' How could I promise? 'When father knows the whole truth,' I told him, 'he's bound to take a different view. What I'm so frightened about is that he may become ill or break down before he really understands. It's terrible to think that I've hurt him so cruelly.' Poor Ned, he did his best to comfort me. All that day, after John's death, he kept telling me what you've just told Caroline and assuring me that the tragedy had nothing to do with what had gone before." She broke off and remained silent a moment. "I only wish that I could believe him."

"Surely you must believe him."

She shook her head. "Yes and no. My head believes; my heart doubts. I feel just as Caroline does. Ned didn't kill John. Who can have killed him except himself?"

"He can't have killed himself."

"If only that could be proved without accusing Ned. It's because Ned is being accused that I know that Colonel Wickham's ideas about the case are all wrong."

She remained silent again. Dr. Hailey wondered whether or not he ought to tell her that Ned had returned to the house and surrendered himself to Wickham. He decided that, as Dux-

ford had evidently refrained from telling her, he had better do the same. She would learn soon enough, poor woman.

"Our business," he said, "is to find the murderer. When we have done that there will be no need to worry any more about suicide."

"How can you find somebody who can't possibly have been there?"

The question, spoken with unexpected bitterness, revealed the depth of Lady Oldmay's distress. She added, after a moment:

"It's frightful to think that I may have driven him to his death."

CHAPTER XXIV

FOOTSTEPS

DR. HAILEY found it difficult to get to sleep. For, in spite of the comfort he had tried to administer to Caroline and her mother, he had to admit that, so far, there was no alternative to Wickham's theory of the crime. If it was impossible to imagine how John Oldmay could have committed suicide it was equally impossible to see how he had been murdered by other hands than those of his son.

The fact that he had tried to defend himself stood out as the final disproof of suicide. In face of that substantial piece of evidence Caroline's description of her father's uneasy gait lost all significance. No doubt John Oldmay was not himself—his symptoms on this day before his death proved that—and no doubt he was labouring under a sense of grievance. But he had not forsaken his habit of bathing. Neither the housemaid, who had encountered him at close quarters, nor the postman had noticed anything unusual.

The doctor turned his thoughts to the jewels. It was probable enough that Lady Oldmay had offered the correct explanation of Ned's omission to tell her about them. But she had not explained how they had come into her son's possession. Had Ned deliberately taken them in order to prevent his mother from learning the truth? Lady Old-

may must have heard, sooner or later, that the jewels were in her husband's safe. But why in that case had he left them in the pocket of his dressing-gown?

He grew drowsy while attempting to answer that question. But the sound of footsteps in the corridor outside of his bedroom door made him immediately alert. They were soft footsteps, creeping footsteps, the footsteps of a person exercising the utmost care to avoid making a noise. Indeed he had sound of them chiefly through the creaking of the boards in the old floor. He got out of bed and walked to the door, using a care not less active than the individual to whom he was listening. The footsteps seemed to have stopped altogether, but a small creak, some distance away as he judged, announced that this had been only temporary. Should he open his door? He bent to see if there was any gleam of light under the door. There was none. He did not know where the switch controlling the lights in the corridor was situated. Before he found the switch the chance of making any discovery would be gone. A louder creaking, which he thought came from the staircase, reached him and he strained his ears to verify that idea. When the sound had been repeated several times, so that he no longer doubted that someone was descending, he turned the handle of his door.

The door made a slight noise in opening. The corridor was quite dark, so dark that he could not see the top of the staircase. He walked in the

direction of the staircase, feeling his way with outstretched arms. When he reached it he stood listening. The floors, downstairs, unhappily were more securely founded than those above. He heard nothing.

Again he was doubtful what to do. If he descended, the staircase would betray him, if he stayed where he was he might miss an opportunity. Had Ned broken from his room in spite of Wickham's orders? But Ned had chosen to give himself up. There was Duxford, and Nagge, and perhaps Caroline or her mother. . . . He almost believed he could hear the waves on the beach. The night, though, was calm and quiet except for the sea-birds. Then a faint sound, which he instantly recognized as that of a window being opened or shut reached him. He descended to the hall.

The house was without breath of movement; night had penetrated and possessed it. He moved towards the front door and, when he reached it, stood again to listen. His ears were filled with emptiness. But he could not say that he was alone and, merely by thinking that he might have a companion in the dark, he gave leave to his overstrained senses to imagine the fulfilment of his thought. He put out his hands. He stepped forward and then backward. When he encountered no resistance and heard no sound his apprehension was quickened. The walls seemed to come nearer, taking and holding him prisoner among uneasy shadows. The air felt hot; it became quick

as if it was charged with electricity. He put his hand on his brow and discovered it wet and the discovery brought lively memories of John Oldmay's last night in this place and of the forebodings which had attended it. Had that man experienced the sensations he was experiencing? A strong inclination to open the front door and relieve the tension tempted him, but he resisted it, reflecting that it would be an operation attended by enough noise to declare his whereabouts unmistakably. He leaned against the door, with his back to it, and from this vantage searched the darkness again. It filled his eyes, as it had filled his ears, with its vapours. He was dressed only in his sleeping suit. He felt cold suddenly in the heated air and wished that he might return to his bedroom to dress himself. Then he became aware of a mild draught of wind which was flowing to him from the door of the study beside him. Was the door being opened? He recoiled a few steps and upset a chair which went clattering on to the floor. He crouched down.

But the night swallowed the sound. Nothing happened. With his nerves steady because of the shock and its passing, he entered the study. He could feel the draught distinctly now and recognized its source in one of the windows. His hands sought and found the electric switch.

The light showed him an empty room; one of the windows was open. He turned back to the hall and illuminated that also. There was nobody in the hall. He returned to the open window,

which looked out on the sea, and stood gazing at the thick darkness. Then he glanced round the room, at John Oldmay's books and old weapons. Nothing had been disturbed. A sudden curiosity brought him to the safe. He tried its door; it was locked. He had decided to return to his room and dress when he caught the flash of a very bright object on the hearthrug. He went to pick it up, but could not find it. Returning to the safe, he saw it again and marked its whereabouts carefully. And this time he was successful. The object was a tiny fragment of yellowish glass, a mere spicule.

He held it in his palm and allowed the light to play on it. It was smooth on one side, rather rough on the other, where it had been broken. The light was reflected chiefly from the broken side. He took an envelope from the desk and put the piece of glass into it, obeying an instinct which experience had sanctioned. He looked about him, but could see nothing from which the glass might have been broken.

He returned to his room and dressed quickly. Then he descended again and opened the front door, achieving that operation without much noise. He closed the door behind him. The night was wide and fresh, full of its own thought. He looked up at the bare stars and then seaward, observing that there is always an illusion of light on the sea's face. The gravel of the carriageway was curtained right up to the study window so that it was idle to look for footmarks and dangerous,

too, since the beam of his torch must advertise his whereabouts. He waited for a few moments till his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness and then set out towards the shore.

The going was difficult and he stumbled several times on the mounds of tufted grass among the sand. The rhythm of the waves speeded his steps like a music, coaxing and controlling them. Slow rollers were coming into the bay to break themselves on the flats but that major sequence was augmented by the lapping of smaller waves, dim notes which at moments became nearly inaudible. The revolving flash of the lighthouse on Holy Island winked across the distance at the lesser lamps of a lightship. He walked over the piled weed and wreck which marked high water and descended the shelf, that is the containing lip of the full tide to the ribbed sand below. The tide was at ebb; gulls, feeding on the flats, kept up a mirthless chuckling. But this was not loud enough to prevent the splash of oars from reaching him.

At the first intimation of that sound he stiffened, holding his breath. The hour was too late and too early for night-line fishermen and there were no other boatmen on this coast. When he had reached absolute conviction, he ran down to the water's edge, actually splashing into the water in his haste. The oars were distinct from here, a thrifty dipping interrupted by the soft sound of the rowlocks. He tried to determine the direction of the boat but failed. The sounds grew louder. Was it approaching the shore?

It could not, he knew, reach the shore because of the insufficient depth of water. The idea that the boatman had lost his way crossed his mind and prompted a wish to warn him. But he remained silent. The oars stopped; he heard them roll on their locks. Then he heard the board lurch in the water as its occupant moved about. What was the fellow doing? There was no wind but the waves would soon bring the craft ashore. A few moments passed. The oars dipped again; they grew fainter.

Dr. Hailey waited for a few moments in order, if possible, to discover the direction in which the boat was going. He found it impossible to do this because the sound of the oars grew so faint as scarcely to be audible, and when the sound finally died away he walked in the direction of the boat-house. He found it easily enough; it was locked. He wondered if he ought to return to the house and awaken Nagge who had the key.

But there were objections to that course, the chief being that he would lose the chance of witnessing the return of the boat, supposing that it had been taken from the house. So he waited and was rewarded soon by the glare of a flash lamp. The beam was directed at first a little to the right of him but quickly found him. Instinctively he moved into the shadow of the boat-house. As he did so, he heard the boat enter the house and come bumping and splashing against the landing-pier. He lit his own lamp and tried to direct its light into the house but soon abandoned the at-

tempt. He stood behind the door ready for the emergence of the boatman, and determined to grapple with him. But the man didn't emerge. He put his ear to the door and fancied he could hear the fellow breathing. Then he began to think of ways of getting round to the front of the house.

But if he left his present position the man would be free to escape. No doubt that was the calculation. He felt for the lock and examined it with his fingers. It was set in the woodwork and gave an impression of strength. The door, he remembered, opened outwards; it was useless to try to burst it open. He moved back a few paces from the door and directed the beam of his torch on to the water outside the house. Then he swept the beam round to command the landward side of the house and continued to keep up this movement. He was ready, if necessary, to maintain his watch until dawn, when all chance of escape would be at an end.

A hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned to see Carpenter.

"What on earth has happened, my dear Hailey?"

He explained the situation.

"Good gracious, this may be John's murderer."

"Possibly."

"Can he get out from the other side?"

"Not without being seen. There's two feet of water in the boat-house even at full ebb."

"Really. John told me he had spent a great deal of money on the house. I heard you go downstairs

but didn't hear you come back. So I went down myself. The front door was open."

"I thought I had shut it. Did you see the open window in the study?"

"No. I came outside and saw a light flash down here. I didn't go back after that."

Carpenter paused for breath. "My wind isn't as good as it used to be," he apologized, "though I try to keep fit." He caught at Dr. Hailey's arm. "It's somebody from the house, eh?"

"I think so."

"Duxford, perhaps."

"Or Ned. Or maybe Nagge or somebody else."

"Wickham told me he had shut Ned in his bedroom."

"Um, without a guard."

"What could Ned want down here at this hour?"

"What could Duxford want? What could anybody want? The fact remains that somebody had one of the boats out and that he's in the boat-house now."

Carpenter gasped in the manner peculiar to him when excited.

"How do you know it's a man? It may be Caroline or Gertrude even."

"It may. I've thought of that. The idea doesn't help much, does it?"

"No. No. Still we must leave nothing out of consideration. Do you know, I've been thinking that our only hope of saving Ned in this business is to go over the whole ground, inch by inch so

to speak. We must leave no stone unturned. Not a pebble. Depend on it, if we approach the problem in that spirit we'll solve it. Come back, my dear Hailey, to that letter John wrote me. Ask yourself: how did he know that he was going to be murdered?"

An impatient upward sweep of the beam of the lamp disclosed the doctor's feelings. But Carpenter was not observant.

"I have no notion."

"I believe I can help you. What if John took the jewels down to the beach with him to avoid having them stolen? That would explain his fear and it would also explain how Ned became possessed of them."

"I don't follow."

"He knew he was going to be robbed. He carried the jewels on his person. He was killed."

"But not robbed."

"Ah, you forget that I came on the scene. The murderer had no time to complete his work. He was hiding here, in the boat-house."

"What? With Ned? Ned entered the boat-house a few minutes after you arrived."

Carpenter snorted like an uneasy puppy. "I've thought of that. It would be possible to hide behind the other boat in the water. I feel sure that's what he did. Ned went away to the Hall and I went away. All he had to do was to swim round to the beach and creep off through the sandhills. The artist was so busy with his painting that he wouldn't see anything."

Dr. Hailey expressed no opinion about this garbled version of his own suggestion. The idea, whatever its merits, accorded ill with his present mood. He remained silent for a short time and then announced his intention of entering the boat-house from the sea.

"I want you, if you will, Carpenter, to stay here. If the door is opened turn the lamp on whoever comes out. Try to close with him, of course, but in any case see him. See him without fail."

The Professor sighed deeply several times.

"I'm not a very strong man, Hailey," he suggested. "Should rather doubt if I'd be much good. Don't forget that he's probably desperate. I do think we'd do better to keep together and wait on events. Two's better than one, when it comes to a fight."

"We can't stay here all night."

"Why not? If you like, though, I can go back and waken the servants. That would be wiser, I'm sure. Then we should have ample resources."

There was no mistaking the anxiety in the man's voice. When the doctor hesitated, that anxiety found new argument.

"You would require to enter the water. Believe me that's dangerous at night for a man of your age. Besides, who knows what might happen to you in the darkness? I wouldn't do it, really."

"Very well. Go and get help."

Carpenter hurried away. The doctor sat down on a sandhill and continued his vigil. He was unable to think of any reason why anybody should

go sailing in the manner of the man he was hunting. But again, he couldn't think why Ned had taken his mother's jewels or why John Oldmay had written letters to Wickham and Carpenter announcing his forthcoming murder. If Caroline was right about her father, he was not the kind of man who receives telepathic messages. Vain people are insensitive.

Carpenter's return was announced by beams of light. He came back with Nagge and Duxford, Nagge carrying a shot-gun and trying to look bold, Duxford in his dressing-gown not trying but yawning and rubbing his eyes.

"We've brought the key," Carpenter said.

"What?"

"It was hanging on its hook in my pantry, sir," Nagge declared.

He handed it to Dr. Hailey, who told him to go and keep watch on the seaward side of the boat-house.

"You'd better go with him, Carpenter. Duxford and I will open the door. Is that gun loaded?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're not to fire unless you're attacked."

Carpenter and Nagge went away, sweeping a path for themselves with their lamps. Dr. Hailey unlocked the door and pulled it open. He directed the beam of his torch into the boat-house.

"Best make sure there's nobody there before you go in," Duxford whispered. He was standing close behind the doctor and showed some care not to expose himself. He had scarcely spoken when

the lamp in Dr. Hailey's hand was smashed. The doctor stepped back and collided with him so that he nearly lost his footing.

"Look out, Duxford."

Dr. Hailey sprang to shut the door but in the darkness spent a moment finding it. When he tried to shut it, it encountered a strong resistance.

"Quick, he's here. . . ."

He attempted to bar the way and grapple with the escaping man, but the fellow was too quick for him. He felt the breath smitten out of his body and reeled back, calling feebly to Duxford. A moment later, the sound of heavy breathing told him that his companion had been lucky. He stumbled in the direction of the sound, crying to Duxford to hold on at any cost. The breathing grew fainter. A groan broke on the silence.

"Are you all right?"

There was no reply. He stood peering into the darkness, cursing the cowardice of Carpenter which had robbed him of the third lamp and then his own lack of foresight in having allowed it to be taken away. Hearing nothing he walked a few paces, the sand yielded under his feet.

"Hullo! Hullo, there!"

He waited. This time a very feeble cry from very near at hand answered him. He came a step or two farther and with difficulty saved himself from falling over the man he was seeking. He knelt and took Duxford's hand.

"Are you hurt?"

"I . . . I don't know. I feel sick." The actor began to groan again.

"What happened?"

"He struck me . . . I got faint."

Dr. Hailey stood up. The boat-house was illuminated. He called for help.

CHAPTER XXV

THE YELLOW CRYSTAL

A GLASS of toddy, mixed and administered by Nagge, restored Duxford to something like self-confidence. He apologized for having given so much trouble.

"If you hadn't found me, I should have lain there all night," he assured Dr. Hailey. "My heart seemed so terribly weak. He struck at me again and again and always on the heart. I did cling to him as long as I could."

"Evidently."

The doctor indicated his torn shirt.

"He seemed brutally strong. He smelt of garlic. I think he was tall."

Carpenter accepted a glass of the butler's toddy with alacrity and swallowed a mouthful or two.

"We heard nothing," he said in the tones of a man far from sure of himself. "I began to get anxious."

"I wish we had had a second lamp. I suppose I am to blame for dividing our forces, but he might have tried to escape by swimming."

Dr. Hailey's voice was cheerless. The blow he had received had not hurt him but he continued to feel shaken. The temptation to blame his companions was still strong enough to force him to keep a curb on himself, especially when he

thought of the way Wickham would receive news of the adventure.

"What about Mr. Ned?" he asked Nagge.

"He's in his room, sir. I knocked on his door when I was calling Colonel Wickham."

Wickham entered the room. He wore a black dressing-gown with yellow parrots embroidered on it and looked owlsh.

"Well?"

Dr. Hailey gave him an account of what had happened.

"I thought I had better leave it to you to call the police," he explained.

"Pity you hadn't sent for me sooner. We could have surrounded the place." Wickham turned to Duxford. "Did you hit him?"

"No. I tried to hold him. He ran into me and nearly knocked me down."

"You were dragged some distance?"

"Yes. And he was hitting me all the time."

"What was he wearing?"

The actor looked surprised. "I don't know."

"I mean was he in a jersey, like a fisherman, or in ordinary clothes?"

"Ordinary clothes, I think. His breath smelled of garlic."

"Um. Not much to go on, I'm afraid. I doubt if it's worth while troubling the police, but I'll chance that."

He picked up the telephone receiver and stood holding it, waiting for a response.

"I suppose we may take it," he said to Dr.

Hailey, "that the man you heard in the corridor upstairs was the man who broke out of the boat-house?"

"I think so."

"Any idea what his game was?"

"None."

Wickham gave his number and then turned to Carpenter.

"Did you hear anything?"

"I heard Hailey unlocking the front door. I got up and looked out and saw a light at the boat-house."

"You didn't hear the footsteps?"

"No."

"What about you, Duxford?"

"I heard nothing till Nagge roused me."

"Your bedroom's next to Ned's, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear him moving about?"

"No." Duxford hesitated a moment. "As a matter of fact, I looked into his room before I went out. He was asleep."

The detective's eyes narrowed. He seemed to be going to ask a further question when his call came through. His manner of putting down the receiver betrayed his exasperation.

"The window was half-open?" he asked Dr. Hailey.

"No. It was only very slightly open."

"Anybody going to Ned's bedroom would require to pass your door?"

"Yes."

Wickham turned to Nagge who was standing near the door.

"Why didn't you call Mr. Ned when you called Mr. Duxford?"

"Because I understood, sir, that Mr. Ned was forbidden to leave his room."

"Really. Who told you that?"

"Mr. Duxford, sir."

"When you woke him?"

"No, sir, last night before I went to bed."

"Please ask Mr. Ned to come here now."

The butler bowed and left the room. Wickham sat down and lit a cigarette.

"A burglary was certainly worth while," he said, "so long as those jewels were in the house."

He stared at Duxford as he spoke, causing him lively discomfort.

"I told nobody what you told me about the jewels," the actor declared, "except Lady Oldmay."

"Nagge knew they were here?"

"Oh, yes."

"Did you tell him we had found them in Ned's pocket?"

The question had a snarl in it.

"I told nobody except Lady Oldmay," Duxford repeated.

"She may have told him?"

"Possibly."

"My dear Wickham," Carpenter said, "if you're insinuating that Nagge played any part to-night, other than that which we know he

played, you're wrong. Nagge was asleep when I went to his room and I had a tough job waking him. I told him to call Duxford and went downstairs to get a drink as I was feeling chilly. He joined me here a few minutes later and we waited together till Duxford came down."

"Nagge had the key of the boat-house, hadn't he?"

"It hangs in his pantry."

"Where you found it when you returned to the house?"

"Nagge found it. I didn't think of looking for it."

The detective smoked in silence for a few minutes.

"Does the door of the boat-house lock itself automatically?" he asked at last.

"I don't know."

"It does," Duxford said. "You can open it from the inside without a key but not from the outside."

"So that, if it was left ajar last night, no key was needed?"

Duxford shook his head.

"You can't leave it ajar. It shuts on a spring."

Ned entered the room. His hair was disordered and he looked cross and sleepy. But the strained faces which greeted him effected an awakening. Wickham invited him to sit down.

"Has Nagge told you why I sent for you?" he asked.

"No."

"When did you go to sleep?"

The young man smiled faintly.

"Pretty soon after you left me, I think."

"Were you awakened at all?"

"I'm not quite sure." He stuck out his flamboyant bedroom slippers and contemplated them. "I seem to remember hearing somebody come into my room. But I may have dreamed it."

"When?"

"During the night."

"Please be serious. Did you look at your watch?"

"No, no. I didn't wake up, really."

"Did you hear anybody walking in the corridor outside your room?"

"I may have."

"What?"

"I may have. I'm a heavy sleeper and my recollection of what happens in the night is always pretty mixed, you know."

"Still, you would have wakened if anybody had come into your bedroom."

"I doubt it. I've been a bit strained lately and that always makes me sleep more heavily."

Wickham leaned forward.

"Someone did enter your bedroom last night," he declared.

"Really?"

"So that you were not sleeping so heavily as you seem to suppose."

Dawn had turned the sky a deep violet before the Pykewood policeman arrived. Wickham and

Dr. Hailey accompanied him to the boat-house. The broken glass of the doctor's lamp on the threshold reflected the beams of their torches. The lock on the door had not been tampered with. When they entered the house Wickham pointed out that the boat with the fixed rowlocks was riding free.

"He didn't trouble to tie her up."

"It was pitch dark, you know."

Dr. Hailey got into the boat and moved the beam of his lamp up and down, over her seats and foot-boards. He was about to leave her when he saw something gleaming among the coils of her anchor-rope. He bent and picked it up. It was a large crystal of yellow glass.

CHAPTER XXVI

NAGGE PROTESTS

INSTINCT is quicker than intelligence. Before he had decided what to do with the yellow crystal it was in his pocket. He glanced at his companions and saw that they were busy examining the door. He stepped on to the jetty beside them.

"I don't think," he said, "that we're likely to find anything until the light is stronger. I'm going back to bed."

He left them and walked back to the house. As soon as he reached his room he opened the envelope in which he had placed the fragment of glass the night before. He laid the fragment on a place on the surface of this crystal where that surface had been chipped. It fitted exactly.

There was another large chip on the crystal and several smaller ones. He took a reading-glass from his suit-case and made a careful examination of each of the facets. There were finger-prints all over the glass.

He regretted bitterly now that he had handled the crystal so freely and carelessly; but that feeling changed to surprise when he began to realize that the prints had been made by his own fingers. He worked diligently for more than two hours to confirm or disprove this conclusion. Apart from his own finger-prints the glass was clear.

He leaned back in his chair and drew the coat

which he had pulled over his shoulders more tightly round him. The excitement of his discovery had warmed him; now he began to feel chilly. One thing seemed clear: the crystal had been broken in John Oldmay's study. Only on that assumption was it possible to explain the presence of the very small fragment of glass in the carpet. The fragment was so small that it had escaped being swept up when the room was cleaned. He gazed at the heavy glass: a strong blow had been necessary to fracture it. Was the secret of John Oldmay's premonition of death hidden in those amber deeps where the points of light gathered?

A knock at the door startled him. He put the crystal and reading-glass into his suit-case and went to answer it. Nagge was standing behind the door.

"Excuse me, sir," he apologized, "but might I ask the liberty of showing you my finger? I seem to have run something into it."

"Come in."

The butler held out his right hand and pointed to the little finger.

"It's at the point. I can't see anything myself but it hurts if I touch anything. I noticed it when I was cutting up the lemons for the toddy and it's got worse since then."

The doctor touched the sore place with the nail of his middle finger.

"Does that hurt you?"

"It pricks like."

"I can't see anything. There doesn't seem to have been any bleeding."

"Oh no, sir, there's been no bleeding."

Dr. Hailey carried his suit-case to the opposite end of the room and opened it on the floor. He took out his reading-glass and returned with it. He focused the glass on the finger.

"You're quite right. There's a spicule of glass in the skin."

"Glass, sir?"

"Yes. I can see it clearly. It's the merest point."

He took a penknife from his pocket and drew the blade firmly across the ball of the finger.

"There. It's out. No, don't move, till I tell you."

Nagge remained with his hand extended while the doctor brought a sheet of paper from the writing-table. The dislodged spicule was caused to fall on the paper. Dr. Hailey examined it and exclaimed in surprise. The white background revealed the yellow tint of the glass.

"You have no idea how you got this into your hand?" he asked the butler in sharp tones.

"None, sir."

"This is yellow glass."

Nagge's large face exhibited surprise but not embarrassment.

"Is that so, sir?"

"Yes. You're sure you haven't broken any piece of yellow glass lately?"

"I'm sure, sir, because there isn't no yellow glass in the house and anyway I haven't broken no glass at all."

"Do you ever clean Sir John's study?"

"No, sir." Nagge bridled as he answered, displaying the lively resentment of a professional man whose dignity has been assailed.

"I asked you that question," Dr. Hailey explained, "because I have reason to think that there was a piece of yellow glass in Sir John's study."

He turned and faced the butler as he spoke. The man's face cleared suddenly.

"That's right, sir, I had clean forgot. Sir John had a paper weight of yellow glass. It's on the revolving bookcase at the door—the one what holds the 'Encyclopædia Britannica'."

"It isn't there now, Nagge."

"No, sir?"

The man appeared to be genuinely surprised.

"No. If you look you'll see that it isn't there now."

When Nagge left him Dr. Hailey decided to take Wickham fully into his confidence. He had not meant to do this until he had followed up the clue of the yellow crystal, because he was feeling sore about the way he had mismanaged things earlier in the morning. But he recognized that the butler's intervention was too important to be kept to himself. It would be necessary to interrogate the man in the most searching fashion and with the full weight of authority behind every question.

He put the spicule of glass in an empty pill-box and hid it away with the other exhibits. Then he shaved and dressed. He found Wickham in the study reading a portentous-looking document.

"Look at this," the detective said. "It's the report on the rowlock. They've found traces of blood at several points of the metal. The hair is genuine enough and almost certainly belonged to John. I sent them a piece of his hair for comparison."

Dr. Hailey glanced at the careful account of tests and counter-tests. He handed the paper back to Wickham and told him what he had discovered.

"If you care to come to my room," he said, "I'll show you the pieces of glass. There is no doubt that the piece I found in this room was broken from the yellow crystal. There is very little, if any, doubt that the spicule in Nagge's finger came from the same source. It had not pierced the skin to a sufficient depth to draw blood and consequently may have escaped notice for some time—until he happened to press upon it."

Wickham had folded the report. He put it into his breast pocket.

"The crystal used to stand on the top of that book-case," he recapitulated. "It was apparently broken where I am standing now. You found it among the coils of the anchor-rope of the boat which has fixed rowlocks. Nagge had a piece of it in his finger. Is that the complete story?"

"Yes, if you add that there were no fingerprints, other than mine, on the glass."

"You say Nagge may not have known that he had the glass in his finger? Does that mean that he may not have felt its first entry into his skin?"

"Yes. The surface of the skin is insensitive. It's only when the deeper layer is pressed on that pain is felt."

"Surely he might have picked up the glass when cleaning this floor. You found one piece of glass on the floor. There must have been other pieces."

"I thought of that. He denied that he ever cleans this floor."

Wickham looked down and examined the sides of the fireplace. The black marble was unscratched. He looked at the hearth and then at the carpet.

"The crystal wasn't broken by being flung across here," he stated.

"No."

He rang the bell and when Nagge answered it asked him to come in and sit down.

"You told Dr. Hailey," he said in his crispest tones, "that a yellow crystal paper-weight used to stand on that revolving book-case over there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had it been there long?"

"Oh yes, sir. It was there when I came here first."

"Dr. Hailey asked you if you had noticed that it was there no longer. You said that you hadn't noticed?"

"That is so, sir. I hadn't noticed."

"Can you remember the last occasion on which you did notice it?"

Nagge rubbed his brow. His face had reddened

and resembled a freshly-cut steak. Lines of worry were gathering about his mouth.

"No, sir, I can't."

"Try to remember."

The detective snarled, warning Nagge that he commanded rather than persuaded.

"I can't remember, sir. I know that I saw it not so long ago, but when, that I don't know."

"Does 'not so long ago' mean before Sir John was murdered?"

"I think it does. Yes. Yes, it does."

Nagge raised his head, sticking out his chin. But he failed to look easy or even dignified. His big body seemed to shrink.

"Your reasons?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Your reasons for saying that you last saw the crystal before the murder?"

"That is my recollection, sir."

"I want to know what your recollections are based on. How can you be sure that it was before and not after the murder that you saw the crystal?"

The man remained silent, seeming to sniff at the air above his head.

"These have been anxious days for me," he said at last. "It isn't likely that I would notice small things."

"Have you no better reason than that for your statement?"

Nagge whipped a red handkerchief from his

pocket. He astonished both by his manner of doing this and by the handkerchief's colour, but less so than by the way he used the handkerchief. He was weeping.

"Forgive me, gentlemen," he urged, "but my master was also my friend. His death has been a heavy sorrow to me."

He wiped his eyes, presenting such a spectacle of grief as held the others frost-bound. Wickham wriggled in his chair, allowed a decent interval to pass and began his questions again.

"I must ask you now," he said a little unsteadily, "if you have any idea what has become of the yellow crystal?"

"I have no idea, sir."

The detective crouched:

"But you know it was broken?"

"No, sir."

"Come, come, Nagge, this won't do. You were present, as I happen to know, when the crystal was broken."

The butler's mouth opened and remained thus for several seconds. Then it shut, slowly.

"It isn't so, sir."

"Why not tell the truth?"

Dr. Hailey watched Nagge. The man's face seemed to tighten as though all its muscles had contracted together. Dignity and courage lighted his eyes.

"I am telling you the truth, to the best of my ability," he said.

"Very well," said Wickham. "Let me tell you

that the piece of glass Dr. Hailey has just taken from your finger is a piece of the yellow crystal."

"That may be so. I can't say."

"It is so."

Nagge shook his head.

"I don't understand it."

"Do you still deny that you were present when the crystal was broken?"

"I was not present."

"Take care. This may be a far more serious matter than you think."

"I was not present, sir."

"When did you first notice the glass in your finger?"

"When I was making the toddy for Mr. Duxford. I rubbed my finger and found that the more I rubbed it the more it pained me, so I asked Dr. Hailey to look at it."

"Did you go into the boat-house this morning?"

"No, sir."

Wickham waved his hand in dismissal. But the butler ignored that gesture.

"For the moment, sir," he said, "as I cannot disguise from myself I am under your suspicion. That entitles me to speak as man to man. Speaking as man to man, I desire to say, with due respect, that I think you have acted in this case with too much precipitancy. For example, you have as good as accused Mr. Ned of the murder of his father. We that live here and know Mr. Ned, know that he did not kill his father, that not

being possible to his nature which is good and kind and gentle."

Nagge paused. He had risen and looked down at Wickham. He held himself so stiffly that it seemed as if he had more to say. But no, he turned and stepped out of the room.

"What do you think of him?" Wickham asked.

"He gave me an impression of honesty."

The detective laughed without mirth.

"Most people seem to give you that impression, my dear Hailey. It's astonishing what faith and trust you have in your fellow-men."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE RIDDLE OF THE SANDS

THE post brought Dr. Hailey the Admiralty chart of the coast about Pykewood village for which he had telegraphed the night before. He spent an hour after breakfast studying it. It showed that a current ran into the bay, near the boat-house, and swept round it. Part of this current left the bay again to travel seaward towards Holy Island but the larger part made a complete circle, returning to the boat-house. At high states of the tide there was therefore a sort of whirlpool in the bay, in which an object afloat might move round and round indefinitely.

He marked the place where John Oldmay's body had been found, putting a cross in pencil on it. This place lay at the junction between the incoming current and the whirlpool. The farthest point to which John Oldmay could have swum lay somewhere on the other side of the whirlpool, but so far as the currents were concerned he might have been murdered anywhere within the bay. His body would be carried round so long as the tide remained high enough to float it. The depth of the water, at different states of the tide, was given in the chart, but it would be necessary to verify them by actual observation.

He found Wickham at the boat-house pursuing

some investigation of his own and told him what he proposed to do.

"The position of the body," he said, "may be very important."

"I had the same idea. I want, in any case, to test the theory you suggested last night—about the use of a second boat. I don't feel absolutely justified, especially since the escape of that man last night, in arresting Ned till I've tested it."

Dr. Hailey took a knife from his pocket and cut a number of the floats from a net which hung on the wall of the house. Then he and Wickham entered the boat with the fixed rowlocks. He took the oars and rowed to the point given on the chart as the place where the incoming current met the circulating.

"They found the body here?"

Wickham assented. The doctor took his watch from his pocket, laid it on the seat in front of him.

"It's quarter-past ten. High tide's at noon. The conditions are almost exactly those which obtained when John Oldmay began his bathe. Do you agree?"

"Yes."

The doctor dropped one of his floats into the water. It moved slowly away from the boat, going towards the bathing-beach. He went to the bow and threw out the anchor. They saw the float pass along the face of the beach to the Breamish brook and then turn seawards again. It returned to them in twenty minutes from the time of its going. Dr. Hailey made a calculation.

"If the murder took place at 7.40," he said, "there was time for the body to make four complete rounds of the bay and one incomplete round before it was discovered here at 9.10. The murder must have taken place, on that showing, off the mouth of the Breamish brook."

"Some distance off."

"Yes."

"In other words at a point on the line of Ned's approach to the boat-house?"

"Yes."

Wickham stared at his companion.

"That disposes of your idea that John was killed near the shore and that a second boat, this boat, was used?"

"Yes."

"Ned killed his father, Hailey."

"I should like to measure the depths, if you don't mind."

Dr. Hailey pulled up the anchor.

"John Oldmay's body would require two feet of water to float it," he said.

He released a second float and then took a piece of string from his pocket. He tied this to the sinker of a deep-sea fishing line with which he had provided himself and took a sounding.

"Three feet," he announced.

The cork bobbed ahead of them. A stroke brought them to it and again the doctor sounded.

"Two and three quarters."

At the next sounding the depth was two feet,

then a foot and a half, then a foot, then eight inches.

"Obviously," Dr. Hailey said, "the body did not circulate in this current. There wasn't enough water to float it all the way round."

"But the tide was rising."

"Admittedly. All I'm suggesting just now is that the calculation we made out there is worthless. The body must have gone aground here for a time at any rate. It didn't circulate like these corks. It remains to discover whether, even at high tide, there was water enough to float it."

Wickham looked puzzled.

"You're assuming that the murder took place out there."

"No. That's not the point. Wherever the murder took place the body must have been carried by the current seeing that the lungs were full of air. It must therefore have approached the beach; the current runs towards the beach. As it approached the beach it must have gone aground because there isn't enough water to float it. But the tide was rising. It may very well be that, at full tide, the body floated again and so was free to continue its course."

"What if there wasn't enough water at full tide to float it again?"

"In that case we can say for certain that the murder took place in a depth of water insufficient to float the body until near high tide. The body, if it could not complete the circle of the current, must have remained where it was murdered until

the tide rose. It cannot have begun to float until about nine o'clock because, had it floated earlier, it would have been carried back again by the current into shallow water and stranded before being found. We know that it was found in deep water at 9.10 and further that it takes any floating object twenty minutes to make the complete circle of the bay at this state of the tide."

Wickham did not dispute the reasoning. He seemed listless and gave only fitful attention to the new experiments which the doctor was conducting. But when the tide rose to its high water and the lead showed that, at high water, the circulating current passed over an area where there was insufficient depth to float any human body, his interest revived. He took the lead and himself confirmed the observations.

"The body," he agreed, "was not carried round in the current."

"No."

"Therefore the murder did not take place near Ned's boat."

"No."

"Good heavens, man, your calculations must be out somewhere! Do you expect me to accept them when that entails denying my own reason. These corks of yours are too light. They have no grip of the water. A heavy body will behave quite differently. It must be so."

Wickham pronounced the last words angrily as if he regretted having confused his mind with this arithmetic.

"Possibly. We can try. This boat is a heavy object."

Dr. Hailey rowed back to the place where the body was found. He shipped the oars and allowed the boat to drift. It followed the same course as the floats. After about five minutes it came gently to ground.

"You see, my dear Wickham. The heavy object behaves exactly as the light object."

He looked at his watch.

"There is still about a quarter of an hour to go to full tide. I think I can show you how the body floated to the point where it was found."

He pushed the boat off the sand with one of the oars and rowed along the shore to the point near the Breamish brook, where the current turns outwards again. He allowed the bow to ground lightly and once more shipped the oars. They saw pieces of weed and other material moving slowly past them in an outward direction. After a few minutes the boat began to move also. Dr. Hailey held out his watch for the detective's inspection.

"We're afloat now. See how long it takes to reach the place where the body was found," he suggested.

The boat drifted out for a short distance and then turned across the bay towards the boat-house. It reached the place where the body had been found in ten minutes from the time it had floated. Dr. Hailey took a piece of paper from his pocket and made a quick calculation.

"The tide is higher now than it was when the

body was found," he said, "and this boat draws less water than was required to float the body. Allowing for these differences I'm prepared to show you exactly where the murder took place."

He handed his notes to Wickham.

"Obviously," he said, "we have to look for the spot where, at or about nine o'clock (but not before) on the day of the murder, two feet of water were available. This spot must be situated in the course of the circulating current and beyond that area in which, even at high tide, the requisite depth of water is not available. In other words there are four conditions to satisfy. First, *time*. The body was found at 9.10 floating in the circulating current. Had it been left in the water it would have been carried by the current on to the sand within five or six minutes—as this boat was. Therefore it left the place where the murder took place, and where it had lain until the tide floated it some minutes before 9.10. Second, *depth of water*. Some minutes before 9.10 there must, at the place where the murder was committed, have been water enough to float the body—otherwise it would have remained where it lay. Third, *position*. The place must lie somewhere in the course of the circulating current, because the body was found in the course of the current. Finally, *position in relation to that part of the course of the current where two feet of water are not available even at high tide*. The murder was committed near where the current flows away from the shal-

low area and remote from where the current approaches it. Do you agree?"

Wickham nodded.

"Yes. Unless we assume that the murder was committed outside of the bay altogether and that the body merely drifted into the circulating current at the last moment."

"No, that won't do. John Oldmay had no time to swim farther than the outside limit of the circulating current before Carpenter came on the scene."

"Didn't you suggest yourself that Carpenter may not have observed the swimmer?"

"I did. But Ned cannot have failed to observe him. If John swam out to sea, he crossed the line taken by Ned when returning to the boat-house. A rower looks out over the stern of his boat. Ned must have seen his father."

As he spoke Dr. Hailey began to row again. He brought the boat to a point near that where he had grounded her to await the rising of the tide.

"I think," he said, "that the murder was committed here."

Wickham leaned over and looked down at the sand over which a few desultory whelks were crawling. The genial sun filled the water with gold. He uttered a cry of astonishment.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A MATTER OF MINUTES

"Look, Hailey."

Dr. Hailey tried to obey but his weight threatened to upset the little craft. Wickham was compelled to change his seat before the inspection could be carried out.

"That white object."

"Good heavens!"

The doctor sat up, excitement gleamed in his eye.

"Well?"

"A dental plate."

"I think so."

The doctor tied one of the floats to the end of the lead line and lowered the lead carefully.

"The tide will have receded in a couple of hours," he said. "Then we can examine the place."

He let the boat drift. The cork, at the end of the line, bobbed on the ripple.

"I saw something gleam in the sand," Wickham said. "I thought at first it was a shell. It's pretty nearly covered."

Their eyes met. The detective's were troubled.

"Dr. Jordan didn't mention that a dental plate was missing," he said. "I confess I never thought of asking him."

"Nor I."

They returned to the boat-house and walked to

Pykewood village. Neither of them spoke, because each was busy with his own thoughts.

They met Dr. Jordan entering his house and accompanied him to his surgery, a room which smelt of lysol and damp. Dr. Jordan smelt of whisky. He seemed to be excited and shut the door with a bang.

"I've been at the Hall looking for you," he exclaimed. "Extraordinary news. Johnstone, the M.O.H. of Newcastle, is at the inn now. He's on the track of a typhoid epidemic and swears that poor John Oldmay had the disease on him when he was murdered."

"What!" Wickham ejaculated.

"My dear fellow," cried Jordan, "diseases are like criminals. We use your methods of tracking them. Three weeks ago Lord Scott, the brewer, gave a dinner in Newcastle. It began with a dozen oysters apiece or hors-d'œuvres. Three of the people who chose the oysters are dead and others are ill. John Oldmay was one of those who had oysters. Johnstone's got a list of all the guests and he's following 'em up so as to get 'em isolated." He turned to Dr. Hailey: "Now, by George, we have the explanation of those long-distance hearing and smelling feats. Irritation of the brain, my dear sir. Irritation of the brain."

"Duxford suggested that."

"Duxford be hanged. Fella' that chucks medicine for the movies ought to be."

Dr. Jordan opened a cupboard and brought out a decanter, a siphon and glasses. He invited his

visitors to drink and looked disappointed when they refused. He poured himself out a stiff peg, slumped in the soda and raised his glass:

"May we all live as long as ever we want," he exclaimed, "and never want as long as ever we live."

"We'll call and see Dr. Johnstone immediately," Wickham said, "but what brought us here was to ask you if John Oldmay had a dental plate."

"Yes, he had. Two of 'em as a matter of fact. He had a lot of teeth extracted last year. I gave the anæsthetic. Only a few weeks ago he called me in because one of the plates was hurting him. A bad fit."

The detective kept his eyes fixed on the glass of whisky, as if he wished to avoid meeting Jordan's eyes.

"Did you notice whether both plates were in his mouth when you examined his body?" he asked.

"By George, no, I didn't." Jordan put his glass down. "There you are. That's our science for you. I think I'm making a complete report and I omit the obvious. Too much detail, too little common-sense. Mind you, though, Colonel Wickham, you're a bit to blame yourself. Don't mind telling you I was rattled by the way you behaved over my examination of the rowlock. Getting turned down like that makes a fella' careless. Yes, it does."

"Might I suggest," said Wickham dryly, "that you come to the Hall this afternoon and remedy the omission?"

"Of course, old man, of course."

Dr. Johnstone was a very small man with a face which instantly and irresistibly suggested a frog. It was a benevolent frog, though, grown old and stout in well-doing.

"A most extraordinary case," he declared. "And a most disturbing one. It was only three days ago that we realized what we were dealing with and by that time there were some fifteen infections. Fifteen! A most virulent infection too. Several of the patients showed cerebral symptoms before the classical signs presented themselves. From what Jordan has told me I conclude that this was the form Sir John Oldmay's attack assumed."

Dr. Hailey assented.

"He had a great exaggeration of sensual acuity."

"Quite so." The Medical Officer of Health raised his fat hands and shook them at his visitors. Fat, white, featureless hands they were. "Several others had the same exaggeration. It was accompanied, naturally, with a good deal of mental disturbance, irritation and then depression. One cannot help wondering whether the state of the nervous system bore any relationship to the tragedy of Sir John's death."

Wickham stiffened like a terrier.

"There's no question of suicide," he declared.

"So I gather. Still, provocation may play its part in murder, may it not?"

Dr. Johnstone smiled without joy. He had no

desire, apparently, to pursue the matter. "My visit," he stated, "is concerned with the possible spread of infection, with the 'contacts.' I have given Jordan full instructions about watching for any manifestation of the disease."

Wickham's gloom deepened as they walked back to the Hall.

"We can't dismiss the fact that John was ill from our reckoning," he said, "but I fail to see what bearing it can have on the murder. Typhoid fever doesn't crack skulls."

Dr. Jordan had preceded them. He joined them in the study shortly after they reached the house.

"John's upper dental plate is missing," he stated.

Wickham told him what they had found on the shore.

"We shall, of course, confirm the observation when the tide falls," he said. "But there's little doubt about the plate. Hailey, without knowing of its existence, chose the spot where it is lying as the probable place of John's murder."

"Good heavens! Then Ned is innocent."

Jordan's face flushed. The blear in his eyes lighted up.

"Possibly."

"But, my dear sir," he cried, "what becomes of the rowlock? You needn't tell me that the blood and hair I saw weren't real."

"They were real."

"If John was murdered inshore, Ned can't have

done it. Ned was afloat when the old man left this house."

Wickham offered no further opinion, nor did he discuss the case with Dr. Hailey after Jordan had gone. But on the way down to the beach his uneasy silence broke.

"I confess I can make nothing of it," he said.

"Nor I."

They found the float immediately. The place was half-covered by sand. Both men inspected the place where it was lying but added nothing to their knowledge.

"The murderer had no time to reach the Breamish brook before Carpenter came on the scene," Wickham said. "I can think of no way in which he can have escaped."

"No."

They stood looking about them; the bare sands offered no cover.

"At least we get rid, finally, of the suicide theory. There isn't so much as a cockle-shell on which he could have injured himself. Do you know, my dear Hailey, when Nagge told me half an hour ago that a shark had been caught off Pykewood village, I actually began to wonder if . . ."

Wickham didn't finish his sentence.

"I'm afraid sharks need more than two feet of water for their activities."

Wickham secured the plate, leaving the float and sinker to mark the spot where they had found it. They walked back slowly to the Hall, to which

Sir John's dentist had been summoned by telegram.

"Haven't you built on Carpenter's evidence to a large extent?" Dr. Hailey asked.

"Yes. But don't forget that I tested his evidence. He must have reached his observation post about the time he gave us—7.35."

"It's a matter of minutes. Assume that his time of arrival was 7.40; the murderer could perhaps have got away up the course of the brook into the shelter of the dunes. Ned's back was turned, don't forget. Unless he stopped rowing he saw nothing till after Carpenter's arrival, till he got very near the boat-house in fact."

Wickham shook his head.

"I'm afraid that wouldn't help us. John may have reached the beach at 7.30. He didn't reach the place where he was murdered till 7.35 at the earliest. The tide was well up and walking—or swimming—in two feet of water is slow work. The murder must have occupied a minute or two. If Carpenter arrived at 7.35 he ought to have seen the murder. If he arrived at 7.40, he ought to have seen the murderer making off towards the Breamish brook. If he arrived so late even as 7.45, the murderer was probably still in sight. The artist was at his post at 7.45, and at that same moment Ned reached the boat-house. Ned, therefore, ought to have seen the murderer too. Finally there's Duxford. He rode along the dunes at 7.45 and ought therefore to have seen the mur-

derer escaping—ought to have met him face to face. None of these people saw anything.”

Wickham paused. His jaw was thrust forward but his eyes were blank. He smiled bitterly.

“That’s one aspect of the case. ‘Very well,’ you say. ‘John wasn’t murdered where the plate was lying.’ But you yourself proved that he cannot have been murdered elsewhere. You reached that particular spot by a process of reasoning in which, I’m bound to say, I can see no flaw. The odds against there being no connection between your reasoning and the fact of the discovery of the dental plate at the exact spot selected by you are enormous. Coincidences happen, but scarcely coincidences of that sort.”

Dr. Hailey nodded assent.

“I agree with you.”

“Very well, take another line of escape. Assume that John began his bathe earlier than we have believed. You’re confronted at once by your independent witnesses, all of whom are prepared to refute you. Duxford saw his uncle leave the house while he was dressing to go hunting. He had overslept and was therefore acutely aware of the time. As a doctor he’s had special training in accurate observation. Then there’s Caroline. You told me what she confessed to you. She had not been able to sleep. She had been counting the hours. Killing time. She was returning to breakfast when she saw her father. Again, there are special reasons why the sense of time must have been active. That would be good enough, seeing

that Duxford and Caroline are agreed, but in addition we have the postman, the most punctual of public servants and wholly disinterested, and the housemaid who had a clock before her eyes at the moment when she saw her master. It seems to me we may dismiss the idea that John left the Hall before 7.25. What is there left? So long as it was possible to suppose that Ned had killed his father, the case looked simple; now, I confess, it looks—grotesque. Who is this invisible murderer who can hide himself in the sea?"

Dr. Hailey shook his head. He had nothing to reply to this clear exposition of the case. He experienced a feeling of satisfaction that Wickham had been compelled to abandon his oracular manner.

"And don't let us forget John's letters," the detective added. "Typhoid fever or no typhoid fever, he knew he was going to be killed. It's there, in black and white, fully attested by the postmarks on the envelopes. No fake possible in this case. The murderer may seem sufficiently unreal to us; John beheld him as flesh and blood, saw him approaching, heard his footsteps. We have that to put in our pipes, along with the diamonds and the doings at the boat-house last night, to say nothing about your broken crystal which no hand seems to have touched, though Nagge's hand was wounded by it. I tell you frankly I've suspected everybody in turn, Ned, Duxford, Nagge, Carpenter, Dr. Jordan and the women. I can't see a rag of evidence against one of them.

As things stand now, the blood on the rowlock means nothing. John used that boat constantly and may have cut his finger. He had unusually hairy hands as you know."

They reached the house. Nagge informed them that Sir John's dentist had arrived and awaited them in the study.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE DOCTRINE OF REACTION

MR. ISAACS was a hurried little Jew whose manner suggested a canary.

"I came as soon as I got your wire," he told Wickham in the quick tones of a person eager to excuse himself and placate possible enemies. Mr. Isaacs evidently feared the police.

"Very good of you." Wickham pointed to a chair. He sat down himself. "You made a plate for Sir John, I believe, some time ago?" he asked.

"I made two plates, upper and lower. Sir John was suffering from pyorrhœa—pyorrhœa Alveolaris"—the dentist rolled the big words on his little tongue—"and wholesale extractions were necessary. Absolutely, Dr. Jordan will tell you."

"Would you recognize your handiwork if you saw it?"

Mr. Isaacs spread out his palms.

"Really, sir, really. You're joking."

"Far from it, believe me. That's what I've brought you here for—to recognize or not to recognize. I'd like to know in advance how much confidence you feel in your ability to give a positive answer."

"Absolute confidence, sir."

"Good."

Wickham took the box in which he had deposited the plate from his pocket and handed it

to Mr. Isaacs. The dentist opened it and glanced at its contents.

"This is the upper plate which I made for Sir John."

"Sure?"

"I take my oath on it."

"It may come to that."

Mr. Isaacs jumped up.

"Sir," he cried, "every craftsman has his own method. A good craftsman is not likely to forget his work or to fail to recognize it when he sees it. This is the plate that I made for Sir John."

The dentist bent over his work.

"The plate has been broken," he exclaimed. "Perhaps at the time when Sir John was killed."

"What do you mean?"

"It's a new break. The vulcanite is red. See."

He pointed to a thin red line which traversed the plate.

"Vulcanite darkens with use," he declared positively.

Wickham turned to Dr. Hailey: "Is that good reasoning?"

"Yes. The plate was broken recently."

Mr. Isaacs grasped at the air with both hands.

"I know what I'm talking about."

"We found the plate on the shore," Wickham said. "I suppose that if somebody tramped on it while it lay on the sand it might break in this way?"

"Oh yes. And if it fell on rocks, or a tiled floor."

"Now tell me," Wickham stared at the dentist.

"Is it likely, in your opinion, that a blow on the head would dislodge this plate?"

"From the mouth?"

"Of course."

"I don't think so."

"What?"

"I don't think so."

"My dear sir, the blow, in this particular case, smashed the skull."

Mr. Isaacs shook his head and waved his hands in the manner peculiar to his race.

"No doubt, no doubt. But you do not understand the principles of modern dentistry, if you think that any shock of that sort is capable of dislodging a plate. It is not possible, I assure you, provided the dentist has been competent."

"The plate was dislodged."

"Yes."

"Can you suggest how it was dislodged?"

"Perhaps by a blow at the mouth."

"Oh, no. There was no blow on the mouth."

"I don't know how it was dislodged."

"After death the shape of the mouth changes, eh?"

"Perhaps."

"What do you say, Hailey?"

"I think that would be a safe assumption."

"So that the plate probably became dislodged merely as a result of John's death?"

"Very likely."

The dentist shook his head.

"I don't think so," he declared stubbornly. "There must have been something else."

"So far as we know there was nothing else."

When Mr. Isaacs went away, Wickham lit a cigar. He looked tired.

"The little dentist may be right," he exclaimed. "He ought to know. It's only one more mystery to add to the list. Can you think of a single fact in this case which admits of reasonable explanation?"

Dr. Hailey had his snuff-box in his hand. He took a pinch and then replaced the box in his pocket.

"I have been trying," he said, "to understand the condition of mind in which John Oldmay passed the last day of his life. Do you know anything of the physiological theory known as the 'Doctrine of Reaction'?"

"Nothing." Wickham's voice discouraged the explanation he perceived to be imminent.

"The idea is that the world in which we live gives us blows, to each and all of which we must make reply or response of some kind. For example, cold water, at the first plunge, makes the bather gasp; but if he reacts well he's glowing in a few minutes. Cold has been met with heat and has, so to speak, been swallowed up."

Dr. Hailey paused. Wickham said nothing.

"Reaction depends on the integrity of the nervous system. In speaking of responses we assume that the nervous system is normal, that is to say, that it possesses an average tone or degree

of excitability. In other words that cold water or any other stimulus will affect you much as it affects me or Smith or Jones or Robinson. But exceptional cases occur. The majority of diseases change the degree of excitability of the nervous system.

“For example: a man with a feverish cold is unlikely to glow if he goes into cold water. The reason is that the poison in his system has so greatly excited the nerves in his skin that a severe shock is inflicted by the cold water. He is unable to make response to this very violent stimulus and emerges from the water shivering and blue. Do you follow me?”

Wickham nodded. He was beginning to grow restless.

“We know that John Oldmay was suffering from typhoid fever in its earliest stage and that his nervous system was greatly excited. He could hear sounds that ears, normally attuned, could not hear; he could smell scents normally beyond the limit of smell; probably his eyesight was more acute than usual. Lady Oldmay told me that, some days before his death, he detected the fact that the jewels she was wearing were copies of those he had given her. They are admirable copies which must have deceived anybody but a person endowed with special knowledge or special acuity of vision. The man, therefore, was living in an environment of a wholly abnormal kind. His world was dealing with blows of exceptional severity. Every stimulus which reached his brain

was exaggerated and therefore he was compelled to expend his reserves of nervous energy in making responses. Fatigue was inevitable as soon as the reserves were spent. In fevers there is, first of all, a condition of excitement which corresponds to the period of excessive nervous expenditure; it is followed by a condition of low spirits where expenditure can no longer be maintained at the necessary high level. The stimulus which, earlier in the day, evoked a violent reaction, whether of pleasure or anger or irritation evokes, at night, a sense of emptiness and failure. We should expect, therefore, to find John Oldmay lost his energy as the last day of his life progressed; we should expect to see him, towards evening, becoming a prey to exhaustion and to the mental condition which always accompanies that state."

"Just what happened, eh?"

"The essence of this mental condition," Dr. Hailey went on stubbornly, "is weakness. The exhausted man feels that life is too much for him and that he can no longer stand up to take its blows. The more extreme the exhaustion the more profound this sense of inadequacy. Naturally, the immediate colour of his views depends on his circumstances. He may feel forsaken or beaten or betrayed. John Oldmay, I think, felt forsaken. His wife and his daughter, too, had taken sides against him. Lady Oldmay had deliberately deceived him about her jewels—and we know, from the fact that he bought back these jewels, that he

attached great importance to them. His family had shown him that he was the skeleton at their feast and that they wished, above everything, to exclude him from their lives. Translate that idea into the language of depression; his family wished him dead."

The doctor paused and took snuff.

"A fit man would certainly not have allowed his feelings to carry him so far. Had John Oldmay been in his usual health he might have felt greatly upset but he would have preserved a sense of proportion. He would have fallen back on his knowledge that, in spite of their fear, his wife and children cared for him. He would never have entertained the idea that they wished him serious ill. The transition from a natural distress to an unnatural despair is a sign of disease. There is a further step in that descent. Those who feel themselves forsaken and so find no prospect of happiness, sometimes indulge in thoughts of suicide. Suppose that the enemy whom John Oldmay apprehended but could not recognize was—himself."

"John was murdered."

"That doesn't invalidate my reasoning. When he wrote those letters he was sunk in despair. He felt himself alone, isolated, shut out from the only happiness he knew. He was a man of domineering mind, self-centred, egotistical, vain, of an excessive sensitiveness; the position must have been intolerable. These, as I know from long experience, are the conditions most favourable to

suicide. But the man's instincts, his breeding, his ideas were irreconcilably opposed to such a crime. He would not admit the thought of it to his consciousness, and was aware only of the dread it inspired. He saw violence, but not his own hand raised to strike. The enemy, hauntingly familiar, nevertheless wore a mask."

Wickham frowned. He raised himself in his chair and put on his spectacles.

"I don't dispute your reasoning," he said. "No doubt that may be the explanation of the letters. But where does it lead? John had recovered enough of his good spirits to go bathing the next morning and enough of his natural vigour to defend himself when attacked. Those broken fingers don't suggest to my mind the desire to be quit of life. Quite the opposite. After all, too, it isn't certain that he was suffering from typhoid fever. On your own showing, an ordinary feverish cold can cause all his symptoms."

The doctor agreed.

"He certainly defended his life. But anybody will do that when an attack is made. What I have been trying to show is that before the attack was made, thoughts of suicide were hovering on the outskirts of his mind. He was not aware that he was beset by that idea; all he knew was the emotional reaction which the idea occasioned in the unplumbed deeps of consciousness. Hence his fear of an unseen assassin. I believe that this condition of mind carried over to the next morning. Caroline told me that she had the impression from

her father's gait, when he passed her on his way to the shore, that he was labouring under strong excitement."

"Very likely. But what then? His excitement didn't kill him. Show me the connection between his forebodings and his death, my dear Hailey, and I'll take more interest."

Dr. Hailey remained silent for several minutes.

"A man who is afraid of being murdered," he said at last, "sometimes murders because of his fear. That applies to people in normal health; it applies with even greater force to people whose nerves are on edge."

He paused. Wickham's face remained blank.

"Go on."

"John Oldmay might just have reached the Breamish brook and so returned to the shelter of the dunes before Carpenter came on the scene."

The detective sat up.

"I don't understand."

"I'm drawing a bow at a venture. I'm assuming that the murdered man left this house with murder in his own heart. His brain was clouded with fever but it's likely that he retained enough wit to cover his tracks."

"But why should he come ashore? Who was there to murder at that particular place?"

"He knew that Duxford was going hunting."

Wickham drew his breath sharply.

"That's true."

"And it was to help Duxford that Ned had borrowed money. Duxford was the cause of all

the trouble. The night before his death he forbade Caroline to marry the fellow."

The doctor assumed his eyeglass. "If we keep John Oldmay's state of health in view the obvious objections to the theory are discounted to some extent. He was unarmed. Perhaps he jumped out from behind one of the sandhills and snatched at Duxford's bridle. If so, the horse may have reared and struck him with its hoofs. I've asked myself how the actor would behave in such circumstances."

"Lose his head probably. Duxford's the kind of fellow I don't trust."

Dr. Hailey's eyes narrowed.

"I'm not sure. He's nervous, hysterical if you like, but I think he's a decent fellow at heart. I believe that if his uncle had been injured he would have brought him back here at once and got help. The case would be different if the man was dead. In these circumstances he might, I think, become afraid and take steps to dissociate himself from the tragedy. The obvious thing to do was to put the body in the sea. At eight o'clock Ned was home and Carpenter had returned to the village inn. There was only the artist on the shore and as he was painting the village his back was turned. Duxford had only to put the body on his horse and ride down the course of the brook into the water. As a matter of fact, I examined the horse and found a little of its own blood clotted on one of its fore-legs. A bite from a fly perhaps, or a scratch from John's nails as he defended himself."

"That would account for the broken fingers?"

"Yes."

"When the body was flung down into the water, the dental plate probably got dislodged."

"Yes."

Wickham rose.

"Shouldn't we be able to find some evidence of the encounter? Bloodstains on the sand, for example?"

"I don't know. John Oldmay was killed suddenly. There is no bleeding after death."

They walked to the mouth of the Breamish brook and examined the ground in its neighbourhood. The soft sand on the dunes bore traces of hoofs, but they failed to find any bloodstains.

"You can see," Dr. Hailey pointed out, "how completely hidden one is among these sandhills. Even a man on horseback would not be seen easily from the boat-house."

"No; it is obvious that your theory may be correct in the sense that there's no insuperable objection to it. Things could have happened that way, whereas, unless we're prepared to talk about sharks, they cannot have happened in any other way. It's a good rule, you know, that the explanation which fits all the facts is the true explanation."

"Especially if one includes among the facts, considerations of character and temperament," Dr. Hailey said. "Duxford we must not forget is engaged to Caroline. The idea that he—or his horse—had killed her father must have been pe-

cularly distressing. Would she marry him if she knew the truth? Might she not, even, since her father had refused to allow the marriage, begin to suspect him? He's very much in love with her. Why not leave the body to be carried out to sea? Most likely it would never be recovered; at the worst it would be possible to suggest that the swimmer had been struck by the propeller of some coasting vessel. It's exceedingly improbable that Duxford had an accurate knowledge of the currents; he assumed probably that the body would be carried out on the ebb tide. The fact that he didn't take it farther from the shore is explained by the danger he ran of being seen from the windows of the Hall."

Wickham's irritated nerves did not allow him to delay questioning Duxford. With a candour which surprised Dr. Hailey, he told the actor exactly how matters stood.

"I'm not making any formal accusation, understand," he declared. "I'm merely pointing out to you that it is possible, in a material sense, that your uncle met his death in this way."

"He didn't."

Duxford's brave tones accorded ill with his white cheeks.

"I'm not even suggesting foul play," Wickham went on calmly, "a frightened horse, rearing up suddenly, can easily kill a man in spite of its rider."

"I tell you I never so much as saw my uncle."

The detective, who had returned to his place at the desk, tapped on the wood with his pencil.

"Your uncle was killed, you know. Only you and Ned were anywhere near him at the time. We have reason to believe, as I told you, that Ned cannot be guilty."

Duxford glanced about him and then suddenly sank into a chair. He tried to make a show of smoking a cigarette but dropped his case on the floor.

"I've just heard," he stammered, "that a shark was landed this morning at Pykewood."

"My dear sir, sharks don't venture where the water is only two feet deep, nor do they attack those parts of a man's body which are out of water."

"My uncle prided himself on being able to swim under water for long distances. He was always practising that trick."

"In two feet of water?"

Duxford picked up his cigarette-case, but the act of bending down did not bring the blood back to his cheeks.

"How do you know," he asked, "that he was attacked in two feet of water? He may have tried to reach the shore."

"Good heavens, are those the kind of injuries which sharks inflict? Use your common sense."

"I don't know. Do you?"

Wickham caught his breath.

"I feel certain they're not. Besides, death was

instantaneous. It's impossible that he can have moved about after he was attacked."

Duxford recovered himself enough to light a cigarette.

"How do you know his body didn't float in with the tide?" he demanded.

"Because, as I've explained to you, the current moves in a circle. As I told you, Dr. Hailey indicated the spot where we found the dental plate as the spot where the body must have been lying when the tide rose high enough to float it. If the murder didn't take place at that spot—and it cannot have taken place there—then it must have taken place among the dunes."

The cigarette broke in Duxford's fingers and he flung it into the fender.

"I know nothing about it," he said in low tones. "Absolutely nothing. I thought the current flowed out of the bay towards Holy Island."

"It does, in part. But the greater part sweeps back to make a kind of whirlpool."

Wickham leaned back in his chair, a sign that he had no more questions to ask. His face had recovered its expression of menace. Dr. Hailey, who was watching the actor, saw that he was exceedingly alarmed.

"You've studied the currents in the bay?" he asked him.

"No. I've heard my uncle and Ned talking about them."

"Surely they knew of the circulating current?"

"They didn't mention it."

The doctor looked incredulous.

"It's the most striking characteristic of the conditions here. I can't imagine that it was left out of any discussion of them."

Duxford was about to leave the room when Nagge entered.

"Mr. Ned wants to know, sir," the butler asked Wickham, "if he may leave his room."

"Ask him to come here, will you?"

"Very good, sir."

Ned's composure emphasized his cousin's anxiety. Duxford, who had been told to remain, and was standing near the door, frowned and blinked by turns while Wickham told Ned what he had found.

"I'm hiding nothing," the detective concluded. "And I'm accusing nobody now. I merely state the facts. As they stand it seems obvious that the accusation against you must be withdrawn."

"You mean that it must be transferred to my cousin?"

"No. Even granting that your father met Duxford among the dunes, there is nothing to show that his death was not due to an accident ——"

Ned's mouth hardened.

"Accidents which are not acknowledged at the time," he said, "are apt to be looked at unfavourably later."

"That may be."

"The whole idea is absurd."

"Why so?"

"My father would not have behaved in the way you ascribe to him."

"Your father was ill with typhoid fever. His brain had been attacked. Dr. Hailey has no doubt on that point."

"What?"

Ned's voice rang out. When Wickham informed him about the visit of the medical officer of health he sighed as if a heavy anxiety had been lifted from him.

"So that he was not fully responsible for his actions?" he asked eagerly.

"Probably not."

Ned glanced at Duxford.

"I'm quite sure, all the same," he said, "that my father didn't leave the water. I saw Dyke riding along the dunes as I was landing. He waved to me."

"Did you watch him riding away?"

"I watched him till I came near the house. The trees hide the dunes from the avenue."

"You see. There's a period during which his movements were not overlooked. Professor Carpenter was on the dunes, near the boat-house, but from that position you can't see the spot where your father may have met his death."

Ned frowned.

"Isn't it more likely that my father swam out too far and got struck by the propeller of some passing coaster? A great many small vessels pass just outside the bay."

"My dear sir, your father had no time to swim

out of the bay before Carpenter appeared on the scene. Carpenter was looking for him and must have seen him. You yourself must have seen him since he would have been swimming at or very near the place where you were rowing at that moment. Unless he swam clear of the circulating current in the bay his body must have been carried inshore and stranded near the boat-house, for there is insufficient depth of water to bear it right round the circle of the current, and it is certain that he cannot have swum clear of the current."

"I see."

"Consequently it follows that he was killed in the bay or among the dunes. He was not killed in the bay."

Wickham emphasized the last statement by staring at Ned, but the young man bore his scrutiny without flinching. He turned to his cousin.

"Do you remember, Dyke, when you joined hounds?" he asked.

"Some time between eight and the half-hour."

"Where?"

"At Jackson's Mill."

Ned nodded. "That's three miles away."

"Ample time to remain among the dunes for a quarter of an hour," Wickham commented.

"It doesn't follow. One may ride a long way before finding hounds even if they're close at hand."

Duxford advanced to his cousin's side.

"Why not ask members of the field to confirm what I've told you?" he said.

"We shall do that, of course."

When they were alone again, Wickham told the doctor that he believed that at last they had struck the trail.

"Duxford was mortally frightened. You saw that?"

"He's an actor, you know."

"Doesn't that tend to confirm the theory rather than to disprove it? He can't have wished to show us his anxiety."

CHAPTER XXX

THE CRYSTAL AGAIN

DR. HAILEY found Ned in the walled garden at the back of the house. The young man had lost his confident manner and was pacing about among the flower-beds. He showed no eagerness to welcome the intruder.

"I've just heard about the shark they landed this morning at Pykewood," he declared. "Depend on it that's the explanation of father's death. These brutes inflict frightful injuries as any of the fishermen will tell you. Attacks by sharks in northern waters aren't nearly so uncommon as people suppose."

He stared defiantly at the doctor as he spoke.

"Really?"

"I'm sure of it."

"The difficulty is that if your father was not killed on dry land he was killed in two feet of water. You know about the course of the current in the bay, I take it?"

Ned nodded.

"Yes."

"I bought a chart in order to study it. But I fancy it varies with the state of the tide. Is that so?"

"It varies a little. The circulating current is less well marked at low tide."

"Do you suppose that your father knew about the circulating current?"

Ned stood still and gazed at his companion.

"How could he possibly help knowing about it?" he demanded. "He bathed practically every day and spent most of his leisure in boats."

"Do you suppose that your cousin, Duxford, knew anything about the currents?"

"Oh, yes. Everyone who comes here gets to know about them."

"He suggested that he didn't know about the circulating current."

Ned started and then grew confused.

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you misunderstood him."

"Oh, no."

They walked a short distance in silence. Suddenly Ned put his hand on the doctor's arm.

"Do you really believe," he asked, "that my father was ill at the time of his death?"

"Yes."

"Mentally as well as physically ill?"

"Yes. He was suffering from encephalitis—inflammation of the brain. Typhoid fever often begins in that way."

"You know, I think, about my debts?"

Dr. Hailey nodded.

"Your mother told me."

"Did she tell you everything?"

"I think so."

"About my cousin's production of Macbeth?"

"Your cousin told me about that."

The young man hesitated.

"Do you think that my debts played any part in making my father ill?" he asked.

"Certainly not. Your father got typhoid fever from some oysters he ate in Newcastle."

"Still, the worry I caused him . . ."

"Oh, no. Typhoid fever attacks anyone it reaches, no matter what state of mind. It was the fact that he was suffering from typhoid fever which made your father take such a serious view of your debts, not your debts which made him ill. In ordinary circumstances, I suppose, he would have called you a fool and been done with it."

"He was temporarily insane?"

"Not quite that. He had lost his sense of proportion, the power we possess of setting one thing against another. Because your mother had sold her diamonds he concluded that she no longer cared for him. He seems to have thought, for example, that you wished to drown him when the bung came out of your boat some days ago. Your sister's quarrel with him convinced him that she, too, had forsaken him. And so on. He felt himself isolated, deserted and lacked the power of a healthy man to discount these gloomy feelings. There were flashes of anger, as when he sent for Carpenter and when he broke off your sister's engagement with Duxford, and moments of relenting as when he told Carpenter to hold his hand about the will till the next morning. These ups and downs always occur in such cases."

Ned's grasp on the doctor's arm tightened.

"If only we had known!"

"My dear sir, if he hadn't worried himself about one thing he would have worried about another."

"Still, we might have made him feel that we cared for him."

The young man turned away his head as he spoke.

"The whole business is like a nightmare," he said sadly. "My cousin Dyke was so eager, so earnest, so sure of himself that I really believed that his film was bound to succeed. It seemed a small thing to put my name on a bill, when that was going to give him such tremendous satisfaction and perhaps establish him in his profession. I never dreamed that I would be asked to pay a penny."

He broke off, remaining silent for a time.

"Perhaps I would have risked it, even if I had felt some qualms," he admitted, "because Dyke's a good fellow and I love my sister deeply. If he hadn't persuaded me, she would have. He had rather a thin time as a boy and felt, I dare say, that the luck was all on my side. That of itself made me inclined to help him. When I realized, suddenly, that I owed many thousands of pounds, I felt like a spent fox with the hounds running into him. I couldn't tell father."

He paused again.

"Probably you won't understand. I was fond of father, but I was horribly afraid of him. He

had an uncertain temper, and when he lost it, used to scourge me with complaints and threats. He could strip away all the small defences with which young people shield their dignity. I always became panic-stricken and often, in my fear, stimulated his anger. Then he left me no rag of self-respect. When his anger cooled he preached, for the blood of the Scottish Ministry was in his veins—about thrift and honesty and hard work. He always seemed to be giving my mother back-handers and I could not endure it. Every time he lost his temper she was sure to suffer. And yet we knew him for a good friend. We trusted and loved him. It's the feeling that our behaviour may have driven him to his death that's so terrible. My mother and sister, I know, are haunted by it."

"I've explained to them," Dr. Hailey said gently, "that, since your father defended himself, they can dismiss from their minds the idea that his death was connected in any way with family affairs. As Wickham said, domestic upheavals don't break skulls."

Ned sighed deeply.

"So long as the cause of his death remains undiscovered," he exclaimed, "my mother and sister will go on believing that they had a share in it. Mother is convincing herself now that she is responsible; Caroline is convinced already. In their hearts, both of them believe that father killed himself. You know what women are, the kind of evidence Colonel Wickham deals in simply doesn't convey anything to their minds. I know

they'll shipwreck their lives unless we can give them something definite to set against their feelings—Coroner's verdict, for example. When Wickham withdrew his charge against me I really believed, for a moment, that he had come to the conclusion that father had met with some accident. I felt a tremendous load taken from my mind. Now that he's transferred his suspicions to Dyke all the ground will be gone over again, and I don't think mother and Caroline can stand it. The idea that Dyke could possibly be guilty is absurd, of course. But when women's nerves get frayed they lose their sense of proportion."

His voice betrayed his distress. Dr. Hailey remained silent for a few moments, giving him a chance to recover himself.

"Unfortunately," he said, "Wickham has no choice. How can he shut his eyes to the fact that your father was the victim of a brutal murder? It's his duty to find the murderer. The feelings of your mother and sister ought not to influence him in the least degree. From his point of view the fact that the murder he is investigating occurred soon after a family quarrel is the merest coincidence. Not a scrap of evidence exists to connect the two events."

They came to a seat made of carved stone. Dr. Hailey sat down.

"Can you remember," he asked, "the last occasion on which you saw the yellow crystal which used to stand on the bookshelf near the study door?"

He raised his eyes to look at Ned as he spoke. Immediately he jumped up.

"You're feeling ill?"

The young man reeled and caught at his arm. He brought him to the seat and instructed him to put his head between his knees.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE COAL GLOVE

NED recovered himself quickly. He declared that he could not remember when he had last seen the yellow crystal. He kept his hand pressed to his brow.

"You have seen it on the book-case?" Dr. Hailey asked.

"It always stood there."

They walked back to the house. The young man explained that the strain of these last days had worn him out. He left the doctor at the study door. In the study Dr. Hailey found Wickham bending over a large glove of black velvet which he had taken from the coal box. The detective seemed to be greatly excited.

"Ah, Hailey," he cried, "I've been waiting for you. Look at this!"

He pointed, as he spoke, to a fragment of yellow glass which lay embedded in the velvet.

"Look at it with the reading-glass," he urged. The doctor obeyed.

"Another piece of the yellow crystal?"

"Yes."

Wickham pointed to the hearthrug.

"You found one piece there. I have found a second piece in the coal glove. A third piece was embedded in Nagge's finger. The crystal itself

was in the boat. What do you make of this evidence?"

His eager tones suggested that he had arrived at his own conclusion and found satisfaction in it. Dr. Hailey shook his head.

"Nothing," he confessed.

"Where was Nagge when John left this house to go to the beach?"

"I don't know."

"Nobody knows; I've just been questioning the servants. Shall we assume for argument's sake that he was waiting among the dunes?"

"Well?"

"And that, when his master approached, he struck him with the yellow crystal. Killed him. Stripped off the dressing-gown and carried the body into the water. There was no watcher anywhere at that moment remember. Nagge had only to remove his boots in order to leave the foot-marks on the sand which we have assumed were John's. He possessed ample time to leave the body where we found the dental plate and come ashore up the Breamish brook. Once among the dunes he put on his boots and returned to the house.

"But it was necessary to wipe the crystal. Look at that stain on the velvet. Is it a blood stain, do you think? The crystal had been cracked. In cleaning it he broke away some small fragments—this one in the glove, the one which stuck in the skin of his finger. He was too agitated to notice such trifles; he must wipe his finger-prints from the glass and get rid of the broken crystal. He

visited the boat-house and dropped it among the coils of rope, where you found it."

The detective drew a sharp breath.

"Why did he kill his master?" he went on. "He had seen the packet of jewels arrive a few days before. He knew it was locked in the safe in this room; he knew that his master carried the key of the safe in his dressing-gown. A fool would have taken the key at once, and been discovered; he was content to wait until the gown was brought back to the house. When I questioned him about the jewels, though, he lost his nerve. What if his room was searched! Ned had run away that night. Why not put the jewels in Ned's pocket till the danger had passed?"

Wickham removed his spectacles and wiped them. His face was grave, but triumph shone in his brown eyes.

"Well?" he asked. "What do you say?"

"I confess I had been thinking along the lines of my own theory."

"About Duxford? My dear Hailey, you can dismiss that finally from your mind. Just after you left me, one of the housemaids asked to see me. Her father and mother live in a cottage on the edge of the dunes, near the Breamish brook. The old man was out of doors early and saw Duxford ride by."

Dr. Hailey picked up the glove and looked at it closely.

"I agree that this may be a blood stain," he said. He sat down and took snuff.

"It's a pity the police omitted to make records of the foot-prints on the sand," he said. "That would have settled the question."

"No doubt. But we have excluded Ned and Duxford. The case is narrowing down. If Nagge didn't kill his master, who did?"

"Wouldn't your theory permit you to suspect anybody who happened to be living here, any man I mean?"

"No, sir. The point of my theory is that Nagge knew about the jewels."

There was a knock at the door. The butler entered.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" he said to Wickham.

"Yes, Nagge."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I was out when you sent for me."

"Shut the door, will you?"

Nagge obeyed and came to the desk. His big body swayed a little as he crossed the floor. The expression of melancholy on his face seemed to have deepened. He stood, with his head raised, sniffing the air.

"Where were you, Nagge," the detective asked, "between 7.20 and 7.45 on the morning on which your master was murdered?"

"In this house, sir."

"Where?"

The butler cleared his throat. A slight flush spread over his red face.

"As a matter of fact, sir, I was in my bed. On

that morning, unhappily, I overslept myself, a very rare fault with me, if I may be allowed to say so."

Wickham went forward.

"Your fellow-servants say that they do not know where you were at that time."

"No, sir, they would not know."

"What do you mean?"

"My habits being so regular, sir, they would think I was up at my usual hour, which is seven o'clock. Naturally I did not tell them of my fault."

"Um. So you can't prove that you were in bed?"

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"You can't prove that you were in bed at the time I have stated?"

"Yes, sir, I can prove it, sir, as it happens. When I got up, sir, I went to the window of my room to close it while I was dressing. Looking out, sir, I saw Miss Caroline walking towards the house and I'm sorry to say, sir, that she, happening to raise her eyes, as you might say, saw me, too. If you ask Miss Caroline, she will confirm what I have told you."

Nagge's head seemed to have risen farther and farther while he was speaking. His broad, ruddy throat was stretched tight from chin to collar.

Wickham dismissed him.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE END OF THE ROAD

CAROLINE confirmed the butler's story without hesitation.

"He wears a white night-gown, you know," she told Wickham, "and a night-cap."

"When did you see him?"

"Just after I saw father going to bathe. I was waiting till father got away from the house. I looked up because I heard a window being shut."

The detective's air of alacrity vanished; he passed a weary hand over his brow.

"Does Nagge often sleep on?" he asked without interest.

"More often than he's inclined to admit. He's getting old, though he doesn't like to think so."

Caroline had refused to sit down. She turned to leave the room and then hesitated.

"Have you found anything?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"You don't suspect Ned any longer, do you?"

"No."

"Nor . . . Mr. Duxford?"

"No."

She caught her breath in a gasp of distress.

"I know," she said in a whisper, "that father killed himself."

She continued to nod her head slowly and sadly

like a victim of melancholia. Wickham regarded her unfavourably.

"Do you know how he killed himself?" he demanded in tones which betrayed the greatness of his disappointment.

"No."

"Or how he got his fingers broken as well as his skull?"

"No. I don't know anything about that."

"My dear Caroline, let me tell you, as a detective, that this is the clearest case of murder it has ever fallen to my lot to investigate."

She clasped her hands. Her lips parted.

"If only I could believe that!"

"You must believe it. The evidence is conclusive."

"But you haven't found the murderer?"

"Not yet."

"Not yet! Will you ever find him?" She took a step forward. "How can anybody have murdered father?"

"I don't know."

"What, you admit that nobody can have murdered him?"

"Not at all. I say that I can't at the moment see my way to an explanation. Depend on it there is an explanation."

"A shark was caught yesterday."

"So I have heard."

Caroline left the room, shutting the door softly behind her. Wickham sat down in one of the big arm-chairs.

"So we come to the end of the road," he said bitterly. "Ned didn't do it; Duxford didn't do it; Nagge didn't do it. Nobody did it. John wasn't murdered at all. He killed himself by jumping out of a window and rolled into the sea where a shark was lying with open arms to receive him. My dear Hailey, I confess to you that I've had enough. If John wasn't murdered I'm a Dutchman; if he was I'm a fool. He was and he wasn't, because he can't have been; he wasn't and he was, because he must have been. Do suggest something like a good fellow."

"I've satisfied myself that Duxford lied when he pretended not to know about the currents in the bay."

"Still harping on Duxford. What does it matter, anyhow?"

Wickham was lighting his pipe. The mood of hilarity into which he seemed to be sinking was so unaccustomed that the doctor delayed replying to him.

"It may not matter, of course," he said at last, "but at least it's a lead. People don't tell lies unless they have something to hide. That which is hidden is important."

"The fellow knew we suspected him. He wasn't going to hand himself out."

"He was frank on every other point."

"Very well, let us think in currents." Wickham blew a cloud of smoke from his lips. "Suppose that Duxford did not know how the currents run."

"There is no need to suppose. He did know."

"Right. Then why did he lie about his knowledge?"

"As you know, my first idea was that he had put his uncle's body in the water."

"One doesn't need a sea captain's knowledge to do that."

"No."

"Then why did he lie?"

There was no answer. Dr. Hailey took snuff again.

"That's what I mean to find out," he said.

"I see. Well, my dear fellow, I wish you luck of your search. For myself, I'm going to take a rest. Clear my mind; do nothing for a couple of days. I've found that method work sometimes. It's obvious that we've missed our cue, overlooked something. Yet we've probably seen what we've overlooked. It may come back of itself if we stop trying to find it. To-night before I go to sleep I shall ask myself questions about the yellow crystal, about the man who escaped from the boat-house, about the blood on the rowlock, about the jewels, about John's dental plate. I shan't try to answer any of them. Perhaps my unconscious mind will fit the puzzle together and give me the solution in the morning. It's come to that."

"And I," said Dr. Hailey, "will go and have a talk with Carpenter. We've left him out of the reckoning and he's no fool in spite of his attempts to look like one."

Carpenter was strolling on the beach. He received the doctor with eagerness and listened to him with a lively regard.

"The fault," he proclaimed, "lies in Wickham's method. He tried to find a puzzle, a mere equation, whereas the elucidation of crime is a job for psychologists. I felt that every time I attended a criminal trial and heard expert witnesses contradicting one another. It's a quality of puzzles that you can pull them about to suit your mood. Human nature isn't so accommodating. It resists. It was obvious from the beginning that Ned wasn't guilty, but I suppose that, if John's plate hadn't been found, Wickham would have hanged him."

"What about Duxford?" the doctor asked.

"He's an actor."

Carpenter flung out his arms, like a woman about to take a baby to nurse.

"I confess that I suspected him—on the puzzle principle, I'm afraid."

"He didn't kill his uncle. Actors never kill. They're like artists and musicians and writers. They know how to find an outlet for their feelings. And they aren't greedy; only spendthrift. Murderers are people with no outlet for emotion, passion-bound people, prejudiced people, moral cowards, above all self-centred people. Most murders in this country are committed in spring, when the blood is hot; most murderers are highly respectable folk. Why should Duxford murder his uncle?"

"John Oldmay had turned him out of the house."

The Professor shook his head.

"Caroline's in love with him. That's all he cares about. She wouldn't have heeded her father. It's certain that Duxford isn't guilty."

"There's Nagge."

"What, the old cockatoo! Never!"

"He always reminds me of a big white rat."

"Have you noticed his hands? That glassy, cracked skin, as if thousands of eagles had pecked them."

"He's got a remarkably thin skin."

"And a remarkably thick hide, eh? The man's dull, stupid. Whoever killed John had brains and courage." Carpenter laughed in his soft, chuckling manner. "That night we joined you at the boat-house, old Nagge wouldn't put his nose outside the door of the Hall till he'd armed himself. Strutted off to the gun-room like a frightened turkey-cock and filled his pockets with cartridges. I managed to persuade him not to load till we got near the shore. 'Pon my soul, I expected to have patterns made in my back, especially after he tripped and went sprawling. Happily the gun was at 'safe.' No, don't tell me Nagge's the man."

Dr. Hailey smiled, looking at his companion's genial face. Carpenter hadn't been particularly brave himself at the boat-house, but he could forget so handsomely. If only King Charles had possessed his English sense of humour.

"Can you suggest any other name?" he asked.

"The puzzle again, eh? If these three didn't murder John, nobody murdered him."

"Perhaps."

"It won't do. It won't do. Why should anybody have murdered him? John wasn't the kind that gets murdered."

Dr. Hailey's face cleared suddenly. He caught his companion by the arm.

"I told Wickham I should get enlightenment from you and I've got it," he exclaimed. "This was a murder without motive. I think I must have recognized that from the outset, in a dim kind of way, for I've never before felt so barren of ideas. My mind has gone round in circles." He walked a few paces in silence. "Murder by a madman, perhaps."

"Or a brute beast. They've landed a big shark at Pykewood."

"No. That won't do."

Carpenter turned, thrusting out his beard.

"Why not?"

"Those injuries were not inflicted by a shark."

"My dear sir, any kind of injuries, believe me, can be inflicted by sharks. I didn't spend five years of my youth in Sidney for nothing. The brutes can come into quite shallow water. I'm ready to wager that there isn't a Coroner's jury in England that won't accept that solution if it's given to them by people who know what they're talking about. Besides, what about your puzzle? On Wickham's own showing no human being can have committed this murder. Not even a madman.

When it comes to mechanical details of that kind you can trust to Scotland Yard. They don't dismiss people from their cases for nothing—especially when they have nobody to put in their place. Did you see the shark?"

The doctor shook his head.

"I'm afraid not."

"I did. I made a point of going over to the village and looking at it. A monster with a set of teeth like the blade of a reaping machine. The only mystery is that it didn't bite off an arm or a leg. But you get all sorts of injuries. John probably struggled to his feet as soon as he was bitten in the hand; he wasn't out of his depth. The brute must have knocked him down and then struck at his head."

Dr. Hailey offered no further comment. Carpenter had, clearly, been making up his mind for some time. Now he was possessed of an apostolic zeal which it would be futile to resist. He was disinclined, by Nature, to believe that anyone could be guilty of crime, and took a pleasure, almost savage in its intensity, in observing the discomfiture of man-hunters. When they reached the door of the Hall he waved his arms towards the sea.

"Go and find there," he cried, "the solution of your puzzle. You won't find it anywhere else, thank Heaven!"

The doctor retired to his bedroom and lay down. After about an hour he got his note-book and wrote:

Duxford would not have lied about his knowledge of the currents in the bay unless that knowledge had been exact and special and not merely casual and general. He must, therefore, have made a study of the currents.

He sat gazing out at the sea, become tranquil under the feet of evening. Then he wrote again:

In all probability Duxford knows exactly where the murder took place. I reached that knowledge by a study of the chart. Did he? And, why?

He rose after a few moments and went to the door of his bedroom. The light on the landing was growing dim. He listened but heard nobody moving about. He walked to the door of Duxford's bedroom and knocked. There was no answer. Warily he turned the handle of the door. The room was empty. He entered and closed the door behind him. Then he walked across the room to the writing-table and opened the drawers. They contained blank sheets of note-paper. He turned to the wardrobe and searched the drawers in that formidable piece of furniture. He found a roll of paper under some shirts in the fourth drawer. It was a copy of the Admiralty chart of the bay.

He carried it to the writing-table and held it out. A line, in pencil, ran across the chart, connecting the lighthouse on Holy Island with the lightship between the island and the shore and running from the lightship to the bathing-beach. Near the beach this line was marked with a cross, at the spot where the dental plate had been found. A second cross in pencil indicated the place where John Oldmay's body had been taken from the sea.

He gazed at these markings for several minutes and then rolled the chart and put it back in the drawer. As he did so, he observed that there was a collar lying under the pile of shirts. He withdrew it and saw that it was heavily stained with blood. He glanced at the inside and caught his breath.

The collar bore the name "John Oldmay" in faded letters.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A DAMP BATHING SUIT

AFTER hesitating for a moment he put the collar in his pocket and shut the wardrobe. He returned to his own room and at once marked his own chart as Duxford's chart was marked. Then he scraped a small quantity of the dried and clotted blood from the collar, allowing it to fall into a watch-glass in which he had put some of the fluid used by him to test the clot from Duxford's horse. The blood was human.

Having locked both chart and collar in his own wardrobe and put the key in his pocket, he returned to Duxford's room, knocking again before entering. He reopened the wardrobe and examined the contents of the three drawers which he had not searched on his first visit. In the lowest of these he found a bathing suit. It was damp. A sound behind him made him rise and turn sharply. Duxford was standing in the doorway. Even in the dim light he could see that the young man was on the point of collapse.

"What are you doing, doctor?"

"As you see, searching your wardrobe."

Duxford tottered into the room and sat down on the bed. He put his hands over his face.

"Well?"

"Don't you get your bathing suit dried after you've worn it?"

"If I remember."

The actor's voice sounded faint. He made one of his eloquent gestures, beseeching that the wardrobe might be shut.

"You own a pair of kid gloves, I think," the doctor said.

"Yes."

"Where are they?"

"In my coat pocket, behind the door."

Dr. Hailey walked to the door and put his hand into one of the pockets of the coat. He found the gloves. Then he switched on the light and looked at them. He brought his eyeglass to focus over one of the fingers.

"The leather has been scratched, eh?"

"Has it?"

"Yes, look."

He showed Duxford the scratch, a short cut running transversely across the ball of the finger. The young man offered no comment. He went on wiping his brow with diligence but small success, seeing that it continued to gleam.

"Do you observe that there's a fragment of glass embedded in the leather?" the doctor asked.

"Yes."

"Yellow glass?"

Duxford shook his head.

"I can't say."

"It is yellow glass . . . curiously enough exactly like the fragment I took out of Nagge's finger this morning. There's a puzzle for you, my dear Duxford, how pieces of the same kind of

glass should be found in Nagge's finger and in the finger of your glove."

He walked to the door. The actor jumped up and caught him by the sleeve to detain him.

"You must tell me what it all means," he cried in hoarse tones.

"Believe me, I must find out what it means."

"You have found out."

"No, sir."

"You have. You must."

"I have not." Dr. Hailey freed himself and saw Duxford shrink back. "It's open to you," he said in stern tones, "to tell me the truth."

"No."

"I'm not inviting you to do so. Don't misunderstand me. Probably you'll be sorry if you do."

"I can't tell you."

"What?"

"I can't tell you."

A faint smile appeared at the doctor's lips. For once his geniality had forsaken him.

"Why not say you won't tell me?" he demanded.

"Because it wouldn't be true. I would if I could, I would indeed." He drew his hand across his brow. "I . . . I can't tell you."

His voice broke. Emotion shook him as a terrier shakes a rat.

"I know it sounds mad, crazy," he cried, "but I can't tell you."

"Let us leave it at that."

Dr. Hailey opened the door and stepped out on

the landing. He closed the door softly behind him. When he reached his own room he locked the door on the inside. He took his electric lamp from his suit-case and looked at its cracked lens. The glass had been broken in several places and some of the pieces were missing.

He re-read the notes he had made and then, in spite of the late hour, went out to the boat-house, taking the key and Nagge's electric lamp with him. Having unlocked the door, he walked at once to the boat in which he had found the yellow crystal. He shed the beam of light on the timbers of the bow of the boat and immediately saw that one of these had been indented and slightly cracked on its inner aspect, close to the place where the crystal had been lying.

Darkness had fallen when he left the boat-house and the long beams of the lighthouse on Holy Island had begun their journey across sea and sand. The small lamp on the lightship shone feebly some distance inshore. He walked across the sand, observing as he went how lighthouse and lightship drew nearer to one another until, at last, their beams were joined together. He had reached the line indicated on Duxford's chart. He turned left-handed and strode down to the water's edge, keeping lighthouse and lightship in line. Then he walked back towards the beach, glancing over his shoulder every few moments to assure himself that he had not strayed from Duxford's line. Something tugged at his foot. He lit

his torch and discovered the sinker and float with which he had marked John Oldmay's dental plate.

He returned slowly to the house. Caroline Oldmay was in the hall when he entered. She asked him to accompany her to the drawing-room. She closed the door of that apartment as soon as they entered it.

"I saw you go into Dyke's bedroom," she exclaimed. "I found him and told him you had gone there. I sent him into the room to find out what you were doing."

She paused, catching her breath. Dr. Hailey did not speak.

"After you left the room, I went to him." She came nearer. Her voice fell. "What have you done to him?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"He was trembling, unnerved. He had suffered some terrible shock."

She wrung her hands. Her pale face was full of resentment, like a mother's face when her child has been hurt.

"He's an actor, you know."

"Ah, you're brutal. You don't understand him. Dyke is incapable of acting any part before me. Tell me what you said to him?"

Her clipped sentences threatened. But Dr. Hailey shook his head.

"Why not ask him?"

"I did ask him. He said that he could not tell me."

"Did you ask him why he could not tell you?"

"Yes. He couldn't tell me that either."

The doctor sighed. "My dear Miss Oldmay, if he can't tell you, how should I be able?"

"Because you're hurting him. I feel it."

"On the contrary."

"What, you don't suspect him?"

Dr. Hailey considered a moment. The girl exclaimed at his hesitation:

"You can't deny it. I knew I was right. I love Dyke, Dr. Hailey; and when a woman loves a man she knows what is going on in other people's minds about him. You've found something that seems to incriminate him. He's so highly-strung that the slightest hint of suspicion upsets his mental balance. He suffers so terribly."

She broke off. She was pleading now, rather than accusing.

"I didn't get the impression," Dr. Hailey said, "that he was a coward."

"Of course not. He's one of the bravest men I've ever known. Surely you can distinguish between highly-strung nerves and cowardice."

"I mean that it didn't strike me that he was afraid—only distressed."

"He told me that when people suspect him of any fault he always feels that he has committed it."

"That's common enough among innocent folk."

She grasped her brow with both hands.

"Won't you help me? Must I go on living in this frightful strain?"

"Will it help you if I say that I don't think the strain is going to last much longer?"

She gazed at him.

"What do you mean?"

"I believe the end is in sight."

"The end?"

"Of the mystery of your father's death."

She caught at his arm.

"Tell me," she whispered.

"Not now. To-morrow perhaps. You must bear a little longer."

She did not relax her grasp. Her eyes were wild with new fear.

"Is it . . . is it awful?"

He shook his head.

"You must try to bear a little longer."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE MUZZLE OF THE GUN

HE LED her to a sofa and bade her sit down.

"You can help me, if you will," he said gently, "because there are still a few points on which my information is not exact enough. I should like you to tell me again about the impression your father's appearance made on you when you watched him going out to bathe."

"It frightened me."

"I know. But why?"

Caroline hesitated. "It was the way he walked," she said at last. "I could see that his nerves were on edge."

"You know that he was suffering from inflammation of the brain, that he was in the early stage of typhoid fever, before the temperature rises?"

"Yes. Ned has just told me."

"Don't you think that fact is the explanation of his appearance?"

She contracted her brow.

"Even when he was very angry the night before, he didn't impress me in the same way."

"You were angry yourself, remember."

"Oh, yes, I know. But there was a difference. Something. I can't really say what. But something."

"Did he see you?"

"I don't think so."

"Why do you say that?"

"He may have seen me before I saw him. I was looking towards the sea. When I turned round he had come out of the house."

"In ordinary circumstances, if he had seen you he would have spoken?"

"Oh, yes, of course."

"He was some distance away, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

Dr. Hailey leaned forward.

"How was he dressed?"

"In his red dressing-gown. He always carried his towel wrapped round his neck like a muffler."

"No hat?"

"No."

"Shoes?"

"I didn't notice. I suppose so."

"What did you do after your father went away?"

Caroline hesitated.

"I remember now," she said at last. "There was a letter for me and I took it upstairs to read it."

"You didn't meet any member of the family?"

"No."

"When did you hear that your father was missing?"

"When I came down to breakfast. Mother was just going out to look for him."

"You didn't accompany her?"

She shook her head.

"I knew it was no good."

"What do you mean?"

"We had killed him, among us."

Dr. Hailey frowned.

"You mustn't talk or even think like that," he exclaimed. "It's grossly unfair to your mother and brother. And it shows an unbalanced judgment. People who make great haste to accuse themselves of crimes are usually actuated by vanity."

The girl flushed. She seemed to be about to lose her temper, but controlled herself.

"I was describing my feelings at that particular moment," she said. "I thought father had probably swum far out to sea."

When he left her Dr. Hailey went to the gun-room. He had not before visited this apartment and was struck by the large number of weapons it contained. John Oldmay had bought guns, apparently, much as he had bought books, to look at them, or lend them to his friends. The guns were all in cases, behind glass, but the doors of the cases were not locked. He went to the study for the reading-glass and then began a careful inspection of the stocks of the guns, examining the wood, in each instance, under magnification. One of the stocks was slightly indented, near the lock, but it was not this fact which caused him to bate his breath as he looked at it. Embedded in the wood was a tiny spicule of yellow glass. He glanced at the muzzle. The left barrel was very heavily "choked"; the gun had probably been used exclusively for duck. He carried it into the study, where the light was stronger, and made a further

examination of both stock and muzzle. Then he sat down in an arm-chair by the fire and laid it across his knees. He turned his head to glance at the door, which he had left ajar, and appeared to enter into some calculation. His gaze rested, finally, on John Oldmay's over-crowded mantelshelves. He opened the gun. It was loaded in both barrels. He closed it again and raised the muzzle to the level of his mouth, holding the stock between his knees. Another glance at the door caused him to move his chair slightly. His right hand fingered the triggers; he thrust the muzzle into his mouth.

The gun was struck violently from his hands. He jumped up, caught at the mantelshelf above him and immediately sank on the floor.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE HEAD OF THE HORSEMAN

WICKHAM sprang across the study and seized the gun which had fallen close to where Dr. Hailey was lying. He opened it as a man breaks a stick and exclaimed in lively astonishment. He unloaded it and flung it down on the sofa where lock, stock and barrel lay huddled together. Then he bent over the doctor.

A thin stream of blood was running from a cut on Dr. Hailey's brow. His face had become exceedingly pale and his breathing was laboured. The detective called him by name several times and then, growing alarmed, rang the bell. When Nagge appeared he told him to call Duxford. He pressed his handkerchief on the wound and succeeded very easily, in stopping the bleeding. Duxford entered the room followed by Ned.

"Shut the door," Wickham ordered, "and lock it on the inside."

"What has happened?"

"I don't know."

Duxford's cheeks were almost bloodless when he knelt beside the doctor, a circumstance which did not escape Wickham's notice. The detective turned and glanced at Ned, who had obeyed his order and was standing beside the door. Ned, too, looked fear-stricken.

"He's been stunned," Duxford said in the tones of a man who has seen a ghost.

"Is it serious?"

"I don't think so. He's got a good pulse."

"The head of that ornament fell and struck him."

The detective indicated one of John Oldmay's bronze horsemen.

Duxford rose to his feet. His eyes remained fixed on the shining barrels of the gun. He drew his hand across his brow on which beads of perspiration were standing.

"Head injuries shouldn't be moved," he declared in mechanical tones. "At least not until consciousness returns."

"Hadn't we better get a pillow?"

"I think not. The head should be kept low."

Wickham remained silent for a few moments. He glanced from Duxford to Ned and then back to Duxford. Both remained under the influence of an extreme agitation.

"I happened to come in here a few minutes ago," he said. "Hailey was seated in that chair with a gun between his knees. The muzzle of the gun was in his mouth and his hand was on the trigger. Happily he had his back to me. I picked up a book from the revolving bookcase and flung it at him, knocking the gun out of his hands." He spoke in staccato tones, with effort. "God knows, it was a close shave."

He, too, wiped his brow. Neither of his companions spoke.

"I find it hard to believe my senses. But both barrels were loaded. Half an hour ago I'd have sworn that Hailey was incapable of such a thing. This house . . ." He broke off and swept the room in a wide gesture. "My own nerves are none too steady."

A sigh, long and heavy, broke from Dr. Hailey's lips. Duxford started, like a man surprised in crime. He stepped back, reeled and would have fallen had not Ned caught him in his arms. Wickham saw the doctor's eyes open.

"Lift me onto a chair, like a good fellow."

The detective obeyed, discovering in the heavy exertion an anodyne to his feelings. He stood with his back to the fireplace looking down at his friend who seemed to be making a quick recovery. Ned switched out the main light, leaving only the reading-lamp on the desk, an action designed, evidently, to enable him to get Duxford out of the room without disturbing the patient. Dr. Hailey, whose face was still rather blank, did not appear to notice the change.

"I'm sorry I frightened you," he said in low tones to Duxford.

His voice failed. He raised his hand to his head and touched the wound which had ceased to bleed. Wickham heard Ned unlock the door of the room.

"Only a scalp-wound, my dear Wickham." He sighed deeply. "I hold the secret of John Oldmay's death," he added. "You shall hear."

The key turned again re-locking the door. Ned's figure loomed up against the door. He was no longer supporting Duxford who sat, huddled, in a big chair.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE ASSASSIN

"I WON'T weary you," Dr. Hailey said, "by going over the ground we have covered already. John Oldmay, as you know, was suffering from cerebral typhoid and, in consequence, was taking the revelation about Ned's debts and his wife's sale of her jewels very badly. As I tried to explain to you he had fallen into that deplorable state of mind, so common in cases of inflammation of the brain, in which a sense of isolation from the accustomed stream of life is produced by relatively trifling distresses. No doubt Ned had been foolish to finance Duxford's adventure, but they were cousins about to become brothers-in-law and the actor has built up a considerable reputation. There was nothing so very extraordinary, and certainly nothing in any way disgraceful about the transaction. . . ."

The doctor paused. He asked for a cushion behind his head and expressed lively gratitude when Wickham brought it from the sofa.

"As for Lady Oldmay's part, it admitted at least of a reasonable explanation. In his normal state of health her husband would probably have been angry, but I think he would have recognized that his unbending attitude on the question of debt and his uncertain temper afforded if not justification at least excuse. Sooner or later he'd

have seen the affair from his wife's point of view, bought back the jewels and thought no more about it. Perhaps he would never have discovered anything, because the copies had been made and worn some time before the increase in visual acuity which accompanied the attack of fever, led to his detecting them. But where a normal mind would have made allowances, a mind inflamed by disease gave itself to despair. The first part of that licentious pessimism was the transmutation of the sense of loneliness into the thought of death."

Again the doctor paused. His voice had become stronger but the effort of concentrating his thoughts seemed to be greatly exhausting.

"The thought of death," he continued, "is, of course, present to every human mind at all times. But, usually, it is buried deep in the unconscious. We think without thinking—though that unacknowledged thought influences all our conduct. The nearer the thought of death approaches to the threshold of the conscious mind, to consciousness, the greater becomes the influence exerted by it. I had a patient once who dreamed that he was protecting his wife from an assassin approaching to kill her. He was stricken with great fear when it was revealed to him, suddenly in his dream, that the murderer he dreaded was himself. This was a case of extreme jealousy, in which, I feel sure, thoughts of murder had lurked in the husband's subconsciousness. John's mind was obsessed with the loneliness of death. He felt that death, in some

violent shape—for his discovery of his isolation from his family had come with the effect of a heavy blow—was close beside him. More than that, he was dimly aware that the features of his foe were known to him, though he could not recall them to his mind. He had not, when he wrote to you and to Carpenter recognized the assassin as himself.

“That was to come. Now let me turn to my own process of reasoning. As commonly happens with me, I got a lead when Duxford told you that he was unaware of the direction of the currents in the bay. I felt quite sure that he could not be ignorant of those currents and Ned, whom I questioned, confirmed my opinion. Why had Duxford tried to hide his knowledge?”

Dr. Hailey awaited an answer to his question. Wickham shook his head.

“I have no idea.”

“I argued that, since he disclaimed knowledge, his knowledge must be unusually complete. For, had he possessed only the ordinary information, he would certainly not have troubled to deny his possession of it. Why should he? Everybody here knows about the circulating current. He took a risk in denying such commonplace information. I concluded that if I could discover the reason of his reticence, I should discover something of material importance. I went to his bedroom and found there what I expected to find, namely an Admiralty chart of the bay and its currents. I had, as you know, obtained the same chart for

myself. Duxford, therefore, had informed himself specially about the very subject of which he pretended to be ignorant. His chart was marked in two places. First there was a cross in pencil exactly where John Oldmay's body was taken out of the water by the police; in the second place a line had been drawn between the lighthouse on Holy Island and the lightship outside of the bay. This line had been continued right across the chart to the bathing beach. A cross, near the beach, marked the spot where, as I myself had determined, the murder took place, and where we found John Oldmay's dental plate."

"Good heavens!"

For the first time Wickham showed real interest. He put on his spectacles and bent towards the doctor.

"Duxford may have known, before the event, where the murder was going to take place," Dr. Hailey continued, "but he cannot have known where the body was going to be found by the police, do you agree?"

"Of course."

"Very well, then, either he marked his chart on two different occasions—the first time to show the place of the murder and the second time to show where the body was taken from the water—or all the markings were made at the same time. I found it difficult to understand why it should be necessary to mark the place where the body was found by the police unless it was desired to establish a relationship between that place and the place

where the murder was committed. In other words Duxford's chart suggested that he had followed the same method as I had followed and for the same reason. Given the place where the body was found, he desired, as I had desired, to discover the place where the murder had taken place. As his chart showed, he reached the same result as I reached. I needn't trouble you with that because we worked out the influence of the circulating current fully this afternoon. The question I want to ask is: 'Why did Duxford desire to know where the murder had taken place?' "

Again there was silence. Wickham shook his head.

"Let me amplify my explanation," Dr. Hailey said, "by telling you that I found one of John Oldmay's collars in Duxford's wardrobe and that the collar was streaked with human blood."

He paused, watching the tension of the muscles in the detective's face. He moved a little uneasily in his chair.

"Why did Duxford want to know where the murder had taken place? I confess I could not answer that question, even with the blood-stained collar before me, until I turned my attention to the long pencil-line running across the chart and connecting the lighthouse with the lightship. Another question presented itself: Why, in his search for the place where the murder took place, did Duxford thus indicate the positions of these lights relative to the bathing beach? The answer, I felt sure, must be that he proposed to visit the scene

of the murder at night. He could be certain when lighthouse and lightship were in line, of being in the neighbourhood of the place he had marked as the scene of the murder. All he had to do to reach that place if the tide was low, was to pace the distance from high-water mark. Supposing that he approached the place by boat, as we did, a lead-line would give him his bearings.

"The adventure at the boat-house, last night, began to assume a new significance. I asked myself if it was possible that Duxford had played the chief part in that adventure. I recalled that I had heard footsteps passing the door of my bedroom—Duxford's bedroom, as you know, is so situated that he must pass my door to reach the stair. The man who passed my door left the house by the window of this room—because one may open a window with less noise than is likely to be occasioned by unbolting and unlocking a heavy front door. He went to the boat-house and took out the boat with the fixed rowlocks—the rowlocks of the other boat being in your possession. He rowed to a point at which, as I can testify from personal observations, the lighthouse and the lightship were in line. And he came as close in shore as the ebb-tide permitted. Can you guess what his purpose was?"

"The dental plate," Wickham said in tense accents.

"I think so. I think that he had put himself to all this trouble in order to deposit John Oldmay's dental plate on the one spot to which a study of

the available evidence must point as the scene of the murder. He used the boat in order to leave no foot-prints on the sand. I was imprudent in that I forgot the beams of the lighthouse must have indicated my presence, however dimly, and I suppose that I ought to have made use of my electric lamp, but I was afraid of advertising my presence. The occupant of the boat must have thrown the plate ashore, making a guess (a good one as we know) at the distance. I feel sure he knew that he was being watched because as soon as he reached the boat-house he searched the darkness with his lamp. Again I acted mistakenly in hiding behind the house, but I was afraid that, if he recognized me, I should miss what seemed like a good opportunity of learning something. Before I had time to turn my lamp upon him he had brought the boat into the house. What happened then?"

"I don't know."

The detective's voice betrayed his impatience to hear the end of the story.

"You do know, my dear Wickham, that Carpenter, who had heard me going out, joined me at the boat-house, that I sent him back to get the key, and that he returned with Nagge and Duxford. You know, too, that the key of the boat-house was found on its hook and that Duxford was in bed. How can Duxford have been in the boat-house and in his bed at the same moment? Consider the circumstances. The tide was low, therefore there was no great depth of water in the boat-house. If Duxford left the boat the mo-

ment he brought it into the house, it can have taken him only a couple of minutes to wade out of the house and come ashore in the bay. If he did that then, as he came ashore, he must have seen Carpenter coming down to the boat-house, for Carpenter carried a torch and lit it, as he told me, every step or two. Duxford might now have gone straight back to the house, but he didn't do this because he left no foot-prints on the sand. What he did do, apparently, was to run along the sand, close to the water's edge, till he came to the Breamish brook and then wade up the brook to the dunes. In five minutes at the outside he was back at the house and, as Carpenter had left the front door open, had nothing to do but hang up the key of the boat-house, strip off his bathing-suit and get into bed. He was wearing a bathing-suit. I looked for it and found it, rolled away and still damp, in a drawer in his wardrobe. So it's obvious that he had considered what steps he would take in the event of being surprised."

"But he returned to the boat-house," Wickham said dubiously.

"Yes, in response to Carpenter's request. He couldn't very well refuse to do so, could he? And in any case he had a plan ready to put into execution. He was dressed in a black dressing-gown. In the pockets of that gown were a pair of leather gloves and John Oldmay's yellow crystal paper-weight. How do I know? This afternoon I examined the bow of the boat where I found the yellow crystal. The wood is heavily indented, evi-

dently by the crystal. The crystal can only have been thrown from the door of the house. You see the inference? Duxford remained with me when I unlocked the boat-house door. He was standing close behind me, an invisible figure in his black gown. It was the crystal, which he flung at it, which smashed my electric torch. The crystal went thudding into the boat below, meanwhile Duxford jumped in front of me so that, when I tried to shut the door, I encountered him. The illusion of someone escaping from the shed was complete and says a lot for his powers as an actor. He hit me in the wind when I tried to hold him, for he knew exactly, of course, where I was standing. The rest was high comedy, or farce, though I'm bound to say he gave an excellent rendering of a man who has been knocked out. That touch about the smell of garlic was superb."

"He's a doctor," said Wickham grimly.

"Quite. And that explains also why he wore gloves when handling the crystal. He avoided leaving his finger-prints on the glass. The crystal, though, cut his glove. I found a fragment in the cut. Now we come to the crystal. Why should he have chosen so remarkable a missile?"

Again Wickham's impatience was manifested in his assurance that he had no idea.

"Forgive me if I seem to repeat myself," the doctor said, "but it's necessary to change the point of view a little. Above all, I think, it's necessary to look for the motives of this extraordinary be-

haviour. Duxford isn't a coward, far from it, but he's the last man on earth, if I read his character rightly, to enjoy such an adventure. He must have loathed it; he must have shrunk from the very thought of it. What made him carry it through with such remarkable efficiency?

"Let me say that no ordinary explanation is going to suffice here. It's certain that this man acted in this way because he was driven to do so, forced by circumstances or emotions which were, for him, irresistible. What was the position of affairs at the moment when Duxford flung the dental plate on to the sands? You were convinced that Ned had murdered his father and were in possession of evidence that seemed to be conclusive. Every attempt to shake that evidence had failed and you were already armed with a warrant for Ned's arrest. But the discovery of the dental plate shook that evidence to its foundations. Perhaps it's not too much to say that it saved Ned from the gallows."

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE LURE OF DEATH

DR. HAILEY raised his eyes as he spoke and looked at Wickham steadfastly.

"Am I right?"

"Yes."

"Do you agree that Duxford's adventure was undertaken, in all probability, to save his cousin?"

"It seems a reasonable conclusion."

"It was the finding of the plate at the very spot from which the body must have come—taking into consideration the movements of the current—that convinced you that the murder had occurred at that place?"

"Yes."

"And the escape of the midnight visitor made the arrest of anyone difficult till his identity had been proved?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Now come back to Duxford. He was in possession of his uncle's blood-stained collar as well as of his false teeth. Yet John Oldmay was wearing his bathing-suit when the police found him, and the dental plate was not then in his mouth. How did the actor become possessed of these things? And why was he ready to take such great personal risks to save his cousin if, in fact, he himself was the murderer? Murderers are not usually careful of other people's skins."

"If Ned was the murderer . . ." Wickham interrupted.

"If Ned was the murderer, I can't see how that blood-stained collar came into Duxford's possession—nor how the dental plate was secured—assuming, that is, that the murder took place in the sea. Come back to the facts of the case. You have shown yourself, and I accept your proof, that John Oldmay cannot have been murdered where the dental plate was found. Very well, then, he wasn't murdered at that spot. But it is equally certain that he wasn't murdered at any other spot in the bay, because, had he been, his body would have been carried round in the circulating current and stranded, or, if the place was far inshore, it would have remained stranded. In any event it is long odds that the police would have seen it at once, which they didn't. We're compelled therefore to assume that the murder took place outside of the bay and that the body was carried into the bay by the main current. But this too is impossible, for John Oldmay, good swimmer as he was, had no time to swim beyond the reach of the circulating current. Isn't the conclusion obvious, namely that the murder did not take place in the sea or on the shore?"

"But, my dear doctor, three separate people saw John go out to his bathe. Surely you don't suggest . . ."

"Wait a bit. If the murder didn't take place in the bay then, either the dead body was deposited where we found the dental plate or it was con-

veyed some distance out to sea—one or other of these hypotheses must be right owing to the set of the currents. As I've said, the objection to the idea that the body was deposited inshore is that nobody saw it there, though several people looked for it. On the other hand we have the blood and hair on the rowlock to suggest that it was carried by boat."

Wickham started.

"Good heavens, is that the explanation?"

"I think so." Dr. Hailey moved himself again. "If it was carried by boat the object, evidently, was to take it so far out that the injuries, if it was ever again found, would be put down to a blow from the propeller of a passing steamer. The object was to suggest accident, and, had the current not brought the body inshore at a very early moment, the plan would no doubt have succeeded. That doesn't concern us. What we have to answer now is the question how the yellow crystal, which used to stand on the bookcase behind me, there, found its way into Duxford's pocket? How it got broken. . . . And how, of the fragments broken from it, one remained on the rug, another got embedded in the coal-glove, while a third was taken by me from Nagge's finger. The yellow crystal, believe me, is the connecting link. I began to realize its significance when I remembered that Nagge came down to the boat-house last night carrying a shot-gun."

Dr. Hailey indicated the gun on the sofa.

"In the stock of that gun, I found a further fragment of the crystal embedded in the wood."

He sighed and remained silent a moment. When he resumed his voice had fallen almost to a whisper.

"The story begins," he said, "when John Oldmay went out to post the letters he had written to you and Carpenter. At that moment he was obsessed by the fear of approaching death, fever stricken, hunted but not I think aware, as yet, of the personality of the foe whom he knew to be treading close on his heels. Somewhere in the darkness, under the night, with the boom of the falling waves in his ears, knowledge came to him. He saw the face of the assassin, and recognized it as his own. I think that, in that instant, his mind was raised to a new plane. Like all men of great ability and great success he was an egoist. He lived, to some extent, remote from his fellows. Yet he desired that his fellows should come close to him. They had refused. His own people, or so he thought, had drawn away from him. To his tortured brain the contemplation of death, a short time before so distressing, became agreeable, even alluring. When he was gone they would regret him. He would be revenged then of the ingratitude and neglect which had driven him out of the world. He returned to the house. He got that shotgun and brought it in here. He loaded it. Then he unlocked the safe where the jewels he had bought back were lying. He spread the jewels on the desk, the rings and necklaces which were the symbols

of his love. They should find them there, on the morrow, mute witnesses to the truth of his feelings. I think he handled them for some minutes, pressing them to his lips. The gun was beside him. He rose from the desk and sat down in this chair. He put the muzzle of the gun in his mouth. His hand moved along the barrels to the triggers. . . .”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A RESOLUTE COURSE

THE cackling of the sea-birds filled the silence, quickening it dolefully. Dr. Hailey raised himself and leaned forward, gazing into the fireplace.

“John Oldmay was not alone,” he resumed. “Ned had heard him go out and had listened for his return. Ned was uneasy and sleepless. He came downstairs and crept to the door of this room. The door was ajar. He pushed it open and looked inside. He saw his father’s hands on the triggers, just as you saw my hands just now when I was trying to re-construct the scene and so recapture John Oldmay’s feelings. What you felt, he felt. If he cried out, or spoke a word, or tried to reach his father tragedy was certain. What should he do? The yellow crystal, on the bookcase beside him, gleamed in the lamplight. He snatched it up and threw it, aiming at his father’s hands. The crystal broke John Oldmay’s fingers and was broken itself on the stock of the gun. It struck one of the fire-dogs, rebounded and fell on the hearth-rug. Stung with most lively pain, John Oldmay jumped up, then grew faint at the sight of the blood gushing from his wounds and reeled. He put up his hands to save himself and grasped that upper shelf, overburdened already with his horrible bronzes. Look, and you will see that the shelf gave way under his weight. The bronzes

crashed down on his head, killing him with formidable blows. The head of one of them, that which fell and struck me a moment ago, was broken off.

"When Ned reached his father, the man was dead. But he could not be sure of this. He felt he must get help at once. He rushed upstairs and wakened his cousin, Duxford, the doctor. Duxford told him the truth. Then these two decided, as I think rightly, upon a resolute course. They decided that the truth about John Oldmay's death should not be dragged into a coroner's court. Ned knew too well what the effect of disclosure must be on his mother and sister. Duxford desired only to protect Caroline from life-long sorrow, perhaps—having regard to her nervous constitution—from a still more terrible fate.

"Ned went upstairs to his father's room and fetched his bathing-suit. They dressed the body in the bathing-suit and Ned took the clothes they had removed up to the bedroom and disarranged the bed. They carried the body to the boat-house and put it in one of the boats, that with the movable rowlocks. Ned rowed the boat into the bay while Duxford walked barefooted down the sand into the water and was picked up. The tide was low and would not be at high water until after the time of the dead man's bathe in the morning. There would therefore be foot-prints on the sand, going down into the water, when the search for the body began. They rowed far out, as they thought beyond the reach of the inshore cur-

rent, and launched the body into the sea hoping that it would be carried far away. If it was found, the assumption must be that the swimmer had been struck by some vessels. Miscalculation of the distance necessary to escape from the inshore current was their only mistake."

Dr. Hailey paused. He pressed his hand rather wearily on his wound.

"When they returned to the house they found the dental plate. It had been dislodged by the muzzle of the gun when the gun was struck by the crystal. The wounds had not bled much, because death had occurred instantaneously, but there was blood on the collar. Duxford took charge of that and the dental plate. He cleaned the crystal on the coal glove. Ned thrust the jewels into the pocket of his dressing-gown, meaning to remove them from the house so that his mother should never know they had been bought back. Perhaps they lay down, I don't know. At seven o'clock in the morning Ned left the house and went down to the boats. He rowed out to a point from which he could command a view of the bathing-beach and signal if it was clear. He pretended to busy himself with a fishing line. Duxford, meanwhile, had been making up as he had done for his part of Macbeth at the village theatrical entertainment. He told me himself that his Macbeth was modelled on his uncle. The photograph of the play in the drawing-room shows how excellent was the likeness achieved. He was in hunting dress, with his top boots slung round his neck. His uncle's big

red dressing-gown, into the pocket of which they had put the key of the safe, according to the dead man's custom, covered him completely except at the neck. He wrapped a towel round his neck just as the dead man had always done. For the rest he trusted to his powers as an actor. It must have been a great shock to encounter Caroline but she noticed only a certain tension in the gait of the man she supposed to be her father. The postman and the housemaid observed nothing. Ned, from his boat, signalled that the beach was clear. Duxford then emerged from the dunes and deposited gown and towel and shoes at the place where the footsteps made during the night led into the sea. Returning to the shelter of the dunes he drew on his boots. He strolled back to the house and called for his breakfast. Complete success had been achieved and only the return of the body and the suspicion which, in consequence, attached to Ned, defeated the plan. It became necessary then to play the last card—the dental plate or to confess everything. To their great credit these young men were determined not to confess if silence could, by any possibility, be maintained. I fancy Duxford chose the crystal as a missile to extinguish my lamp because it was less likely to be seen than any other available. Besides, he had it in his pocket."

The lights in the room were switched up suddenly. Dr. Hailey started to his feet and turned to the door. He saw Ned standing guard over the door, as though determined still to prevent

this secret from reaching the ears of his mother and sister. Duxford sat near him, completely recovered though a little pale from his ordeal.

"I had no idea that you were in the room," the doctor said.

Ned's eyes flashed.

"I congratulate you, sir," he exclaimed in tones which challenged and pleaded.

The doctor turned to Wickham.

"Carpenter tells me that he knows something about sharks. He has no doubt that John Oldmay encountered the shark the Pykewood fishermen afterwards landed. He's ready to swear to it. A Coroner's jury of fisherfolk would have small difficulty in accepting that explanation. What do you say?"

Wickham took off his spectacles and wiped them.

"That," he stated in deliberate tones, "will be the view of the case which I shall have the honour to submit to the Coroner to-morrow on behalf of Scotland Yard."

THE END

